

TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP
CULTIVATING COMMUNITY
WITHIN THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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The context is Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church located in Beeville, Texas. One challenge in pastoral ministry is knowing the people you pastor and the people knowing each other. The hypothesis is if the local church participates in a systematic Bible study and have fellowship the members will have a better understanding of what it means to be a unified body of Christ. The research methodology was qualitative which used pre- and post-surveys, group discussions, and journaling. This endeavor can be achieved by the local church community to internally fellowship with one another to become a unified family.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are not enough words or space to fully express what my heart feels at this moment. First and foremost, I give thanks to God who does all things well. This doctoral journey would have been impossible without Him. I am deeply grateful to my wife, Dawn, who has supported my pursuit of higher education for the past twelve years. Though this journey was stressful at times, you never ceased to lift me up in prayer. To my mother, Sylvia Jean Tarver, and my father, Isaiah “Boe” Swisher, thank you for pushing me to strive for greatness in whatever I chose to pursue in life. I miss you both dearly, and wish you were still here. You are not forgotten, but greatly missed. This accomplishment is the fulfillment of the dream we often talked about when I was a child, and you told me it could be done.

To my siblings: Dorothy, Linda, Wanda, Jenee, Michael, Erica, Lynette, Vernus, Rodney, Ronnie, and Jackie - you are all incredible. Thank you for standing by my side throughout these many years. Michael, the Lord took you home forty years ago, but I know if you were here today, you would be grinning from ear to ear. Vernus and Rodney, we had many conversations about this day, and though you were here when I started this journey, now you are among the great cloud of witnesses.

To my son Quincy, and grandchildren, Aalayah and Titus - you have watched me grow over the years, and now I get to be Pops, and Paw Paw again. To all my aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews, your love for me means the world.

I want to acknowledge the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, who has consistently shown their pastor love and support during this journey. Your prayers and provisions have not gone unnoticed. To the countless mentors who have been encouraging since the beginning, thank you for being prayer partners and listening ears. I am unable to mention everyone who impacted my life and ministry, but I would like to acknowledge my “big brother,” Dr. Lester J. Gillespie, Sr. who would lovingly say, “Lil bro, just get it done,” “middle brother,” Rev. Arthur L. Lane who emphasized preparation in ministry, and my late grandmother, Isabella Gage Tarver Meshack whose prayers to God on my behalf never ceased. There are so many others to name, but if I start calling names and leave someone out, it will hurt me to the core. If you have ever played a role in my life, you know who you are, and I greatly appreciate it!

The faculty, staff, and administration of Stark College and Seminary who kept up with my progress, prayed for me, and never stopped encouraging me, thank you! To my pastor and spiritual father, Rev. C.A. Williams, and my home church, Macedonia First Baptist Church, you provided a solid foundation during my childhood that has kept me grounded and my faith strong. Your love and life lessons were sometimes tough, but they molded me into who I am today.

Lastly, to the best cohort at United Theological Seminary, and mentors Dr. Jamison Hunter, and Dr. George Parks, I appreciate your time, guidance, wisdom, and encouragement. What made this moment special was doing it with family; thank you Jamie (Dr. Hunter), and I love you cousin! Dr. Lori D. Spears, your sharp eye and editorial skills transformed many grammatical errors into a polished project presented with excellence.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the three churches God has allowed me to serve as pastor: Macedonia Baptist Church, Carrizo Springs, Texas from November 1993 – October 1996; Greater Mount Olive Baptist Church, Del Rio, Texas from October 1996 – January 2002; and Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, Beeville, Texas from January 2002 – present. Since the tender age of eighteen, it has been a joy to share with the people of God community and its importance.

INTRODUCTION

Fellowship and engagement are a vital part of the local church. With both intact and active, the local church regardless of size can exhibit the spirit of unity in glorifying God. One of the many challenges in pastoral ministry is knowing the people you pastor. However, there is another challenge churches face, getting to know each other.

The aim of the research is to aid the local church of its importance in knowing one another internally. My hypothesis aims to solve the problem of the lack of sense of community, and members in my congregation not connecting in a local setting. If members are unable to function in a local setting without connection, there can be no fellowship internally as one body. The research centers on the foundational chapters that illuminates fellowship and engagement from a biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary assessment.

Chapter one highlights the pilgrimage of my ministry journey, my current church context, and the challenges of fellowship and engagement the church encountered upon my arrival as pastor.

Chapter two provides the biblical assessment of fellowship as explained by the Apostle Paul to church at Ephesus. The thought in this biblical chapter is summarized to discuss the importance of unity, which is an important component of fellowship and engagement. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians provides the foundation of the research. Ephesians gives us three images which help us think about the church. Two of

these images are brought into focus in the midsection of Ephesians. The three images that are intended to give us a vision of who we are as Christ's church are those of a body, a family, and a holy temple. The three images share a common emphasis. Each reminds us again and again that we are one with our brothers and sisters, even as we are one with Christ. However, each of the images also has its own distinctive emphasis.

The biblical picture of the church as a body reminds us that we are called to a life of good works. Even as our own bodies act to carry out the intentions of our minds, so the body of Christ acts on earth to carry out the intentions of Jesus, our living Head. The biblical picture of the church as a family reminds us that we are called to a life of love. As the human family is the context for growth and intimacy, so the family of God is a context in which God's love is expressed to welcome each other and to help each other grow. The biblical picture of the church as a temple reminds us that we are called to a life of holiness. As a temple reminds us of the worship of God, our calling as a holy temple is to bring God praise and honor and glory.¹

Ephesians chapter four spells out the heart of Paul's theology is unity in Christ. Although Ephesians is primarily concerned with the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, Paul's emphasis extends to other relationships as well. Unity should thoroughly saturate every facet of the believer's life.

The burden Paul has on his heart leads to a sadness of sorts as he shares with his audience the importance of behaving Christlike in a non-Christian society; especially after hearing the gospel and making a lifechanging response. When Paul uses the word, "calling" in Ephesians 4:1, it is more than a job or vocation; it is considered a divine

¹ Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987), 919.

appointment. An appointment to not only be called up to live a certain standard, but also called on to be witnesses to the grace of Christ in their lives and to be His servants, all the time. Our whole beings are given over to others. We may not like interruptions, but in a sense, a Christian's job is to be interrupted for the sake of people who need us.

The purpose of study for this passage hinges on its focus of church unity. While it is clear the words "fellowship" or "engagement" are not mentioned in Ephesians 4: 1 – 6, I believe the words are alluded to in the text. The Apostle Paul makes a passionate plea for those on the inside of the church to have longsuffering, patience, meekness, and humility so their witness of Christ would be valid. The danger of a church who is unfamiliar or bickering with one another internally will never be able to express love to one another.

Chapter three provides the historical assessment through the channels of fellowship, engagement and the results given. With historical facts, insight is provided through a conduit of one who exhibited fellowship and engagement. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the embodiment of fellowship and engagement during his ministry in New York City.

While touring the city with fellow students at Union Theological Seminary, he befriended a young black man from Alabama named Albert Franklin Fisher who was doing his social work assignment at the historical Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. He had previously worshipped at Riverside, but soon got weary of the sermons delivered there. Fisher invited him to a service in the downtrodden African American community and it was there he experienced the preaching of Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. who combined preaching with a sense of fiery revival in addition to great intellect and social vision. During this time, Abyssinian boasted fourteen thousand members and was

arguably a “mega church” by these standards being the largest Protestant church of any kind in the United States. This staggered him with enthusiasm as he saw the gospel preached and lived out in obedience to God’s commands. He attended every Sunday to worship and to teach a Sunday School class of boys, he was active in several groups in the church, and he gained the trust of many members and was invited to their homes.²

When Bonhoeffer entered Harlem with Fisher, he met a counternarrative to the white racist fiction of black sub-humanity.³ Bonhoeffer immersed himself in Harlem and saw white America from the perspective of black “American outcasts.” He observed white American Christians from the “rather hidden perspective” of American outcasts in Harlem, where he witnessed a white American accommodation of religion and domination in the form of a white Christ. But with African Americans in Harlem, he did not find Christianity striving to accommodate itself to white supremacist civilized society, nor did he find the liberal Christian expression of the Berlin school of theology that trained him in Germany. In Harlem, Bonhoeffer finally heard something different. He encountered a black Christ as the subject of worship in a Christian dialogue about sin, grace, the love of God, and ultimate hope in a different form to which he was accustomed.⁴

To many African American Christians, pastors in Harlem, and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance movement, the white Christ was a problem. He represented a type of Christianity that served only to instigate black suffering. The God represented by the

² Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 108.

³ Reggie L. Williams, *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 23.

⁴ Williams, *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus*, 24.

white Christ could be described as sadistic; he was a transcendent educator who stood at a distance, coming near only to chastise the sinner with misery. In that case, the popularly derogatory images of idle, lawless, immoral black people made suffering a natural, inevitable, even theologically appropriate part of black life but that Christ was not worshiped in Harlem. Bonhoeffer found that black Christians identified black suffering with Jesus' suffering.⁵

Chapter four provides the theological assessment casting light on the Theology of Love as it relates to fellowship and engagement. Theology of Love is a branch of Christian theology that focuses on the nature of love and its role in the Christian faith. Love is a central theme in Christianity, and the theology of love explores the relationship between God's love for humanity and the love that Christians are called to show to others. From a biblical perspective, the research topic magnifies the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter four, because of God's great plan of salvation and the believers' new identity in Christ, Paul begins a series of admonitions for the readers. He appeals to them to maintain the unity that already exists in the one body God has created. This unity is an essential and natural by-product of the common faith they confess, but it must also be maintained through developing the social virtues associated with selfless love.⁶ At the heart of the Theology of Love is the belief that God is love and that all love comes from God. The minds of Paul and Bonhoeffer are entangled as they both share testimonies of the love of God for humanity and how His love should be expressed toward others. John speaks of this in 1 John 4: 7 – 12.

⁵ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 25.

⁶ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 227.

Christians believe that God's love is unconditional and that it is available to all people, regardless of their circumstances. This love is demonstrated most clearly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the embodiment of God's love for humanity. The Theology of Love also emphasizes the importance of loving one's neighbor, which is a central teaching of Jesus. Christians are called to love their neighbors as themselves and to show compassion and kindness to all people, regardless of their race, religion, or social status. This love is not just a feeling but is expressed through concrete actions, such as caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and advocating for justice and equality.

Theology of Love also recognizes the importance of self-love, which is not to be confused with selfishness or narcissism. Christians believe that caring for oneself is essential to be able to care for others and is an expression of God's love for us. Overall, the Theology of Love emphasizes the transformative power of love in the Christian faith and encourages believers to embody this love in their relationships with God, their neighbors, and themselves.

The Theology of Love is rooted in the belief that God is love, and that love is a central characteristic of God's nature. This idea is expressed in 1 John 4:8, which declares, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." Because we are created in God's image, we are called to reflect His love in our own lives. This means that love is not simply a feeling or emotion, but it is a fundamental orientation of the heart that shapes our thoughts, words, and actions.

Chapter five provides an interdisciplinary assessment of fellowship and engagement through the discipline of transformational leadership which plays a crucial

role in promoting congregational unity within a Christian community. This leadership style is rooted in biblical teachings, historical examples, and theological principles that emphasize servant leadership, empowerment, and a shared vision.

As reflected in my biblical foundations Ephesians 4: 1 – 6 illuminates the image of Paul being imprisoned and establishes friendship between the author and audience that was also considered fundamental to encouragement. Transformational leadership is also rooted in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as reflected in the historical foundations. Bonhoeffer's experience serving at the Abyssinian Baptist Church of New York City was a good example of this theory. It was Abyssinian that he was faced with the staunch reality of who Jesus is and what He embraced. Bonhoeffer desired to imitate Jesus, and to engage within the world He created to bring all to Him that they might believe. His preliminary visit to America did not allow him to get what he was searching for until he arrived at Abyssinian.

There is a disease in the local church, and the cure can only be met with knowing the cause of Christ, and His unlimited love for humanity. For Bonhoeffer, Christians must see society from the perspective of marginalized people since faithful Christianity is calibrated from the perspective of suffering rather than from dominance. This is costly yet crucial to true Christian discipleship.

Finally, the theological foundation of love is an example of transformational leadership. Christians believe that God's love is unconditional and that it is available to all people, regardless of their circumstances. This love is demonstrated most clearly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the embodiment of God's love for humanity. The theology of love also emphasizes the importance of

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By focusing on the needs and development of individual members, transformational leaders inspire and motivate congregants to work together towards a common goal, fostering a sense of unity and purpose within the community. Through the example of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated transformational leadership through his emphasis on serving others and empowering His followers, we can see this style of leadership is not only effective but also deeply rooted in Christian values. Therefore, transformational leadership is an essential tool for building strong and unified congregations that can effectively fulfill their mission and impact their communities for the better.

Chapter six provides an overview of the project, project analysis, methodology, implementation, summary of learning, and conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

Les Brown stated that “Life has no limitations except the ones you make.”¹ I cannot help but agree with him in my feeble attempt to pen my life story. There will be some information written deriving from oral history, and most of it will come from the flowing thoughts of a memory that is as fresh as a cool breeze on a summer day. Years came and went, but by the grace of God, I am still here. Life is a testament and testimony that only you can limit.

Nestled in the bosom of a loblolly pine tree forest sits a city thirty miles east of Austin, Texas called Bastrop. This Central Texas city is dubbed “Lost Pines” due to the mysterious appearance of this pine tree not known to grow in the area. Ironically, a wildfire in September 2011 destroyed most of these legendary trees. Even though a fire destroyed what gave Bastrop its notoriety, something good still came from this city.

I was born at Bastrop Memorial Hospital on Friday, June 6, 1975, at 6:30 a.m. However, I did not enter this world alone. Erica Michelle Tarver, who I lovingly call my “womb mate,” came sixty seconds later. The back of my neck bears a scar from being nicked from the scalpel during my mother’s cesarean section. Dr. B. J. Marshall tried to

¹ Les Brown Quotes, “Life has no Limitations...,” Brainy Quote, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/les_brown_379156.

get me out the best way he could because of my precarious position according to my mother. Several years ago during one of my pastoral celebrations, my mother told the story of how much of a miracle I was because she found out she had twins three weeks before we were born.

The genesis of my becoming was always daunting for me to embrace. For starters, my mother Sylvia Jean Tarver was an unwed forty-one-year-old woman with grown children already; her oldest was twenty-five and her youngest was fifteen. My father, Isaiah “Boe” Swisher, was a married fifty-one-year-old man with three grown sons, and two of them were a set of twins. My parents courted for eleven years before me, and Erica came along. My father lived a double life; he had two families. My siblings remember vividly when my father came into their lives in 1964. They always told me that “he was our daddy before you two were born.” Each of my mother’s children had different fathers, and she married neither of them, including my father. I believe that if she ever married anyone, she would have married my father. Dad’s children never knew about my mother’s children, but they knew about his family and the happenings of their lives. Vernus is my father’s oldest son, and my father told him about us when we were born. However, he failed to accept me or communicate with me until I was twenty years old; and I met Vernus about that time. Rodney and Ronnie, the twins, found out about us after we were born, but we met Ronnie at the age of three and Rodney at the age of eleven. We found out about Jackie, our sister, several weeks before my father passed away from cancer in 2003.

My father was a great friend to my mother’s entire family, and there was respect for the situation in which he and my mother were in. My grandmother never passed

judgment on how my married father spent more time in Bastrop than he did in Austin because of how well he treated her daughter and her children. My aunts and uncles adored my father and considered him as their brother. Dad was a welder with the H. B. Zachry Construction Company and his work took him all over the country where he made many friends along the way. During the time he met my mother, his assignment in Bastrop involved welding the pipe at Lake Bastrop for the Sim Gideon Power Plant to connect to the Colorado River so that it could feed into the lake.

My curiosity posed questions to my mother at times concerning my conception always piqued my interest concerning how I got here, where I was conceived, whether I was an accident or result of a planned pregnancy, and if my mother was on birth control. Such questions produced information that any kid wants to know concerning one's birth, especially when one's parents were not married. At times I felt ashamed about who I was because of how I came into the world. The ridicule I faced from kids at school or in the neighborhood in which I grew up made me feel angry and uneasy. My memory recalls hearing how "Eric, you had to be adopted because your mama was not married to your daddy like ours is." Looking back now, it is clear how stupid it was to hear these words. Children are not conceived because of a marriage; they are conceived because of sexual intercourse between a male and female.

As history was my favorite subject in school, I calculated when my mother and father conceived me. Born on June 6, 1975, the date of my conception had to be around September 1974, around the time my mother obtained an FHA Loan to purchase her home in a new development called "Magnolia Park." This development was close to the housing project in which her and my siblings lived. Mom was an LVN for about five

years and came home from work every day to look out her door at the house she wanted to be built. My oldest sister Dorothy, her husband Harrison, and son Dorson lived in the same complex to the rear. My second sister Linda, my third sister Wanda, my fourth sister Rose, and my brother Michael moved into our new home on 600 Magnolia Lane.

Life on Magnolia Lane was an exciting experience; it was just downright fun. The part of Magnolia on which we lived was just off Main Street, and ours was the fifth house. Our neighborhood was complex with diverse families, and we all knew each other. The late seventies and early eighties offered a time when you did not need to lock a door since neighbors looked out for each other, and anything we needed to borrow could be used without anyone being home. Me and my friends went from yard to yard playing outside on summer days and autumn evenings. Drinking from the nearest water hose from the hydrant in the front or back yard was my replenishment and refreshment, and the streetlight on the corner was the alarm to get inside and get prepared for the next day. For many years, 600 Magnolia was the hub of family dinners and fellowships.

My mother rigorously pushed education. She dropped out of high school when she became pregnant at age sixteen with her first child, but she never let that stop her. She was an avid reader and educated herself on things she needed to learn. Mother was the brains of the family to whom everyone turned for answers; this was attributed to my grandmother who had a sixth-grade education but knew more than some who had a graduate degree. Truth be told, being mediocre or just getting by was unacceptable. My first taste of school occurred in our living room when old enough to speak. Having older siblings and cousins to babysit for mother while she worked was more affordable than paying for daycare. Persons who kept me were left with strict instructions for me

regarding learning arithmetic with flashcards and writing addition and times tables on Big Chief notepads. The television was turned to Sesame Street and anything else that promoted education. I also can vividly recall having to read when she arrived from work and before turning in for the night. Some days I was not allowed to play outside until I read a chapter of a book, recalled what I read, and printed the letters of the alphabet the way they were on the worksheet. Also, we discovered that the stammer I had was also an issue my father and one of my brothers had as well. When opening my mouth to speak and having trouble getting words out, people around me encouraged me not to rush and to take my time speaking. The special education department recommended me for speech therapy two days a week; this continued until the fourth grade.

In my younger days, my mother said, “Eric never meets a stranger” because I was always going up to people introducing myself and wanting to converse. When I was dedicated as a baby, my mother said I made so much noise as if I was talking until the pastor said, “This boy is going to end up preaching one day.” Children being around children is a good thing to ensure that they fail to grow up too fast and learn social skills.

Context

Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church has a total active membership of sixty. Members range in age from thirteen years old to eighty-five years old. Since the church is the only Black Baptist church in Beeville it serves as the hub for everything on the Black community. The Black population in Beeville and Bee County is not considered churchgoers unless a crisis or a celebration occurs. Whereas the church becomes enlisted

to serve as a place for weddings and most of the funerals with persons claiming membership, but rarely attend.

Bethlehem is also a multiracial and multicultural church due to the transfer of members from the First United Methodist Church and the Catholic church whose lives have been enriched by the warmth of fellowship, and teaching. The challenge of leading in this context is hearing the chatter of the need to instruct people about the culture of “our church” teaching them about Christ, and the church He built. The past ten to fifteen years has been a shift from abandonment to acceptance.

The history of the church would suggest growth occurred internally rather than externally. There was always talk of evangelism, but only if it were to reach a certain class of persons. Like any small context, there is always intentionality to control growth so the power of the church would remain in the hands of those who felt they were in charge. The parishioners of Bethlehem in past years had a problem with pastoral leadership due to the misnomer that deacons ran the church, and the pastor was subordinate to them. This act would raise its ugly head when a long-tenured pastor was stricken with dementia, and there was a power struggle among the laity. There was also a problem with connection internally resulting in the lack of growth externally.

My arrival in Bethlehem in 2002 began with the same power struggle as my immediate predecessor. I was only twenty-six years old when I became pastor, but I came in with eight years of pastoral experience. It would be in pastoral experience that I would learn how to choose my fights and battles. Since the Bible is the word of God and the guidebook for a local church, it would be used in all church meetings and discussions. When there was kickback from those who refused to listen to what the word of God said

it was a sign of their level of maturity. Fervent prayer, constant teaching, and continuing in love for the parishioners have been the mantra for this church for the past twenty years. This leads to the fact that preaching converts, teaching cultivates, and cultivations lead to commitment.

The struggle of the pastoral ministry of one who started preaching and pastoring at an immature age is knowing their calling and purpose. Robert Creech in his book, *The Leaders Journey* suggests that to be a pastor in the twenty-first century means to embark on a journey of personal transformation and being an apprentice with Jesus Christ to learn how to live and lead.² Personal transformation is the foundation on which we construct effective leadership. Before one can lead a church to be available to God for the transformation of our communities, leaders need to experience God's transformation of their own lives into greater spiritual, emotional, and relational maturity. God's grace and power, through personal change, to know and do the right thing.

Pastoral leadership at an early age can either grow you up fast or stunt your growth. As churches now seek young pastors to assist in growing their churches with fresh ideas, and vitality there is disappointment among the young clergy in not getting compensated or being popular like their counterparts or preaching idols. Therefore, a level of ambition is planted within the young pastor to make the church where they serve become a carbon copy of a context which the church is not accustomed. There is also a maturity issue of the pastor which can result in a struggle on how to relate to the context. It is relative to Ezekiel preaching to dry bones in the valley or Titus being left in Crete to

² Jim Herrington, Trisha Taylor, and R. Robert Creech, *The Leaders Journey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 25.

set things in order. It took a level of maturity for these men to be obedient to God and embrace the context given to them.

While there is an increase of young pastors planting churches in their desired locations, there is also an exodus of young pastors leaving churches. Some are leaving churches because of the pressure of pastoring, pastoring in an undesirable context, or deserting the ministry altogether due to missing life itself. The latter has been my burden for thirty years as a pastor in the southern part of Texas.

South Texas is what I would personally describe as, “God’s training ground” for the inexperienced young pastor. San Antonio is the last major city in South Texas and anything beyond is considered the wilderness. The cultural nuances of what I was accustomed to was not familiar in my context when I began pastoral ministry. Connections with church conventions, leadership conferences, and fellowship exchanges with other churches are a rarity. Though ministry in this context is difficult, there are many opportunities extended from relationships forged with pastors and churches who have known me for some time.

South Texans are Roman Catholic with its influence within the Mexican American populations. Secondary to Catholicism is Protestant Christianity as South Texans express their faith through Baptist (particularly Southern Baptist), Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Pentecostal, and others. Other religions with smaller numbers, but with adherents in South Texas include Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witness.

Beeville is a city in Bee County, Texas, United States, with a population of 12,863 at the 2010 census.³ It is the county seat of Bee County and home to the main campus of Coastal Bend College. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice operates the Correctional Institutions Division Region IV Office on the grounds of the Chase Field Industrial Complex, the former Naval Air Station Chase Field, in Beeville. In addition, Garza East Unit and Garza West Unit transfer facilities are co-located on the grounds of the naval air station, and the McConnell Unit lies about one mile outside the city limits. Beeville is located between San Antonio and Corpus Christi, and according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 6.1 square miles, all of it land.⁴

Ministry Journey

If there was such a thing as being born and raised in the church the description fit me well. The Macedonia First Baptist Church of Bastrop, Texas is one of the oldest churches in Texas and was the first Black church in Bastrop. Emile High School, which Blacks attended before schools integrated, was also birthed in this church some years after its organization. As Macedonia was the center of the lives of many, it was the place where my family received its training and strength. I never knew my great-grandparents but was told many times how they loved the Lord and his church. How my grandmother raised her children, and her children raised their children made this evident. The current

³ Texas Census Bureau, "QuickFacts Beeville City, Texas; Bee County, Texas; United States," United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/beevillecitytexas,beecountytexas,US/POP010210#POP010210>.

⁴ Joseph T. Hallinan, *Going Up The River* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001), 3.

pastor, Rev. Charles A. Williams, Sr., pastored six generations of the family for the past fifty-four years.

Pastor Williams was one of the few pastors who allowed children to participate in ministries before joining the church. The reasoning behind his method was to suggest if you get them in and start serving then you can get them saved. Of course, in the doctrine of the Baptist church salvation precedes the service of the church, but he did things a little differently which worked for him. My first experience in doing anything in the church was ushering. I was always impressed by how the ushers in Macedonia served with precision and showed hospitality. Stamping tithes and offering envelopes, passing out fans, attending to the women who shouted, and giving the pastor water after he preached were just a few things they did. I wanted to be in the action, and I had to be about six or seven during this time. Aside from serving as an usher, I was involved in the youth department as well.

Sunday after Sunday, I listened intently to my pastor. His sermons were so fiery along with the music ministry that our services let out after 1:30 p.m. The length of service was not accidental as several people from Mt. Rose Baptist Church and Paul Quinn A.M.E. Church (two churches around the corner), along with the latecomers tipped in right when the preaching moment was about to start. The pastor was not an expository preacher, but he had a practical way of dealing with the text. Textual preaching is what he did, and the exciting part of his sermon was when he tuned up or whooped the sermon by making music and a hacking sound at the end of his words. Truthfully, around four years old, I came home after church and mimicked the pastor's preaching so often until I had church in the garage with my cousins and friends when they came over to play. I was in

the yard drinking from the water hose and started preaching using the hose as a microphone. Preaching was so much in me until I preached to my mother's roses. My twin sister Erica mourned the passing of several dolls as I dressed them and placed them in shoe boxes before preaching their funerals. Also, every week he gave me the microphone to sing a song. With me being so short, someone placed me on top of the offering table left of the pulpit. Reflecting on this moment causes tears of joy to begin to flow about how God dealt with me at an early age.

Joining the church was always a desire, but there was always the apprehension that arose. First, I was shy when it came to walking the aisle after the sermon to make a public profession of faith. Had I known after all these years that I did not have to do that, it may have been different. Secondly, the baptistry at our church was upstairs. The older kids frightened us into believing there was a monster or a ghost upstairs; this prevented some kids from wanting to be baptized. Some of us believed this because it was pitch dark in the baptism area when the evening service occurred. Finally, the fear of being baptized and going under the water. This fear would be cynical based on the times I went swimming at Lake Bastrop or Bastrop State Park. Attending Sunday School, Baptist Training Union, and Vacation Bible School was the zenith of my childhood in church, and I knew more needed to be done with my walk with Christ. My fears of professing Christ and being baptized had to be subdued, and that was accomplished with a myriad of questions to those who took the leap of faith and were baptized. The turning point of me accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior was Pastor Williams taking me upstairs and showing me there was no monster or ghost present. Pastor Williams also made sure the light overlooking the baptistry was lit during evening service as well.

December 1982 gave me an astonishing revelation, not only was Christmas coming soon, but we also entered a new year. Why would a seven-year-old child think of something like this? I wanted to make a fresh start at the beginning of the year and knew that it was time to give my life to Christ and his church. After all, I worked in the church, but since I was not a member per se I could not attend business meetings nor participate in the Lord's Supper. My home church was obedient to the exhortation of Paul when he wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."⁵ The ordinance of the Lord's Supper was observed regularly because our church observed it after every baptism, and it was nothing for us to have one every Sunday morning. From the time I was a child, I sat at the feet of my grandmother along with my other cousins as she read Bible stories to us. We sang the songs sung at the church, but most of all we sang, "Take me to the water, take me to the water, take me to the water to be baptized."

January 2, 1983, was a Sunday, and fresh off the beginning of a new year, I could not wait until 9:30 a.m. Sunday school started at that time, but moreover, my pastor arrived at the church office. The pastor's time is valuable, and we were always taught not to disturb him when he arrived at church, but he always had an open-door policy. I walked in with excitement and told him of my readiness to give my life to Christ and be baptized. Surprisingly, my twin sister followed me in as well and said the same thing. I guess since we were born together it was only right to be born again together as well. After telling us what God was going to do in our lives moving forward, he encouraged us to get back to our classes. At 11:00 a.m., I assumed my normal post at the front greeting

⁵ Biblical citations are found in the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, 1 Corinthians 11:26.

people and passing out envelopes and programs as they arrived for church. Worship that day for some reason seemed to take longer than usual. It could have been from the excitement of becoming a follower of Jesus or it could have been the usual lengthy worship experience for which Macedonia was known.

After the sermon, another usher and I placed chairs out at the altar for people to sit when they came up. However, this Sunday I felt uneasy putting out the chair and sitting in the chair, so another usher had this task. I was the first to walk up, my twin sister followed, and it was like a chain reaction of children coming to unite with the church that day; it had to be about six of us listening as the church shouted for joy at how souls were being saved. Keeping up with the custom of not waiting too long for baptisms to happen; I was baptized a week later.

Family reunions were always something to look forward to when I was a kid, and since I was always a big secret on the Swisher side of the family there was a gravitational pull to connect with the Tarver side of the family. My mother met more of her father's family who lived in Beaumont, Texas, and we had huge reunions with them alternating between Beaumont and Bastrop. The year of 1984 was a year I will never forget. As we prepared to celebrate a family reunion in Beaumont the second weekend in July; I along with my twin sister, and cousin Evette left early. The plan was to stay until after the reunion and return home. However, after spending a few days in Beaumont and having a blast on the Fourth of July, my cousin Georgia informed us on the next day that the reunion was canceled.

When speaking to my mother her voice never cracked, but she repeated what Georgia said about the reunion being canceled, and we came back to Bastrop the next

day. Upon our arrival at the house, we saw cars lined down the street and people out in the yard embracing each other while crying uncontrollably; this was not a good sign. I got out of the car and without haste found my mother who sat on the couch with other family members. Erica sat on one knee, and I sat on the other as the words from her lips broke my heart and caused me to shed tears after the initial shock. She said “Your Bubba is dead;” Michael, my brother, died at the age of twenty-four. He drowned on the Fourth of July at Lake Travis while attending his company picnic. As much as I was introduced to death by losing aunts, uncles, cousins, and other people, this one hit differently because it was my brother. His death was the very first death in my immediate family and, besides having a first cousin who was kidnapped several years earlier, this was the first death of the third generation. Michael’s death positioned me to leadership and be protective of my mother and sisters.

During the time Michael passed away, my grandmother was in Fort Worth taking care of her aunt. She arrived back in Bastrop for the funeral and moved in with us to help my mother. Having my grandmother live with us was an experience like none other. Hot breakfast, lunch, and dinner were prepared regularly, and she kept us on a schedule of not missing the bus to school or the van driven by the church deacon to Sunday school. My grandmother was the rock and glue that kept our family together.

Grandma had a dream that served as confirmation of my call to preach at age eleven. I already struggled with being called into the ministry at such an early age. My peers who were, “boy preachers” and other elder statesmen who knew I was struggling with something held conversations among them. This had to happen shortly after Michael’s death; this is not to say his death caused me to want to preach, but it began

around this season in my life. My running from God came to a screeching halt in March 1987 as a sixth-grade student at Bastrop Middle School. A vision from God of seeing a cross on my bedroom wall while doing homework one evening was strange; strange enough for me to see but no one else. Erica thought I lost my mind, but I knew what I saw, and the audible voice of God saying, “Go preach.”

The next day while sitting in math class my mind was in space. The granddaughter of a well-respected pastor in Bastrop asked me to talk to her because she knew something was not right. There was too much I had to say and failed to know how to start so I put it in a note and passed it to her. Our teacher confiscated the note, and my friend never read it. However, we had another class together and I jotted down in shorthand what the previous note said. That entire day had me on the edge because of my need to talk to someone who understood. After the school day ended and began to walk home, I soon ran into Ron Moore. Ron and I grew up together, and he too was a boy preacher. We began discussing what went on with me, and how I failed to know what to do. My desire was not to tell my parents because I felt as if they would not believe me. Also, coming from a family of preachers led to my desire for them not to think that I was compelled or forced into preaching.

Ron and I walked through the football practice field as we continued to talk. He said, “Eric, have you talked to C.A.?” referring to my pastor by his initials and indicated my failure to speak with him. He said, “you really need to talk with him especially if this is bothering you.” Then it started to rain before he prayed for me prior to making my way home as he had to go the other direction. The next day, which was a Wednesday, I knew my pastor would be at ministry meetings because we all met that evening and then had a

prayer meeting. I was so nervous afterward and waited for people to leave the church so I could speak with him one on one. My pastor listened intently as I shared with him what occurred a couple of days before, and his reply was “I knew this was coming and I felt it, but I want you to pray and ask the Lord for another sign.” That night I prayed with tears streaming down my face and kept hearing God say the same as God said before. The morning when I got up for school my grandmother sat on the side of her bed in shock. She was speechless and shaking her head. I asked her what was wrong because she did not look well. She said, “Baby, I had the weirdest dream last night. I dreamed about a boy who was called to preach, and his mama did not want to accept it, or he would not accept it or something.” She just shook her head in disbelief; I knew then that this was my sign to accept my calling to preach. I kept this to myself and told no one except my pastor who said it was time to acknowledge my call at church that Sunday; I had yet to tell my parents or anyone for that matter.

March 15, 1987, I arose early and got ready for Sunday school and carried on like normal. Before morning worship, my pastor met with me about how this would work. He wanted me to come up after the sermon during the invitation and share my story of the call. However, I had not told my mother or father. My mother had to work that Sunday, and I called her direct line to her desk, and she answered. I froze without a word as my pastor got on the phone. He simply said, “Eric has accepted his call to preach, and he is going to announce it today.” She was stunned and said not a word. I got on the phone before she said she knew this was coming eventually and asked if I was ready and sure. Other calls were made to my father, grandfather, and two others my pastor insisted that needed to know. The first person was his pastor, Dr. J. J. Rector of the Antioch

Missionary Baptist Church of San Antonio. The second person was my cousin Dr. Barry Jackson, who was his first son in the ministry at Macedonia and pastor of the Sweet Home Baptist Church of Round Rock. Church seemed longer than usual again that day with me being a bundle of nerves, and after the sermon, I did as I was instructed. It seemed as if the congregants knew what happened as praises to God never ceased. After my statement, the pastor invited me to the pulpit and announced when I would preach my first sermon—the next Sunday, March 22nd.

The week that led up to me standing and preaching was spring break. That gave me a week to prepare my sermon without the distractions of being a sixth grader. I already knew what I intended to preach as the Lord led me to Genesis to talk about Adam, Eve, and Noah obeying and disobeying God. As an eleven-year-old preparing for my first sermon, I grabbed my Bible, paper, and pen before writing my heart out while praying. While preaching this soon raised eyebrows among others who failed to understand why I preached so soon, my pastor received the same method he gave to me from his pastor. He gave me one week to preach because the fire was there, and he believed whatever needed to be said had to be said. My aunt thought it was a clever idea for me to stay with her for a few days so I could write my sermon without any distractions. She was a schoolteacher who was a stickler for being organized as a room with a desk, adequate lighting, and other necessities were at my disposal.

I worked hard on that sermon while failing to forget that I was also on spring break and still a child. Therefore, she encouraged me to go outside and take breaks to rest and have fun. As Sunday evening came, I was ready to say what the Lord placed on my heart. The church was packed and in the congregation was my father, my brother

Rodney, and his wife who I never met. Rodney was the assistant pastor to Dr. Marvin Griffin at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Austin. When my pastor called him up to join us in the pulpit he came up and lifted me like a baby and hugged me with tears streaming down his face. It was the very first time he had laid eyes on me, and he also got emotional when Erica was asked to stand so he could see her for the first time too. After the conclusion of my first sermon, I was presented with my license in ministry.

A disturbance rocked me to the core twenty-four hours later when my father told his wife that he had twins living in Bastrop, and that he could no longer keep this secret. He also told her that I preached my first sermon the night before, and Rodney was there as well. I was in the middle of something that was not my fault. My father's wife vowed never to accept me and destroy my father's integrity if it was the last thing she did. She then called all the family to smear my father's reputation only to hear from them that they knew, and they loved us. Vernus, my older brother, was the one who refused to accept me until years later around the time our father was stricken with cancer and passed away with his dying wish of us loving each other. My father was proud to have three sons preaching and always said I was the best.

Being a boy preacher came with its share of struggles and challenges to maintain a sense of balance. I was still a child and needed to be reminded of it often. I still had a curfew and got disciplined if needed. My friends thought I could not like girls, judged me if I let a cuss word slip, and refused to hang out with me because they thought I would try and change them. When they realized I was just a normal kid, things eased up. I continued to play Little League Baseball being coached by my great uncle who was also a deacon at our church. I went on to play football and basketball from seventh to ninth

grade and only focused on basketball from tenth through twelfth grade. I did normal teenage things like going to my prom and taking trips to the coast with my friends.

Having teachers who knew nothing about church life was a challenge because they said I was too young to be a preacher, or they failed to understand how I could be a preacher at such an early age. The blessing of having teachers with some of them being members of our church was that they explained to their co-workers how things went as it pertains to the church. When this happened, the teachers had a keen respect for me because of the respect the teachers had for their clergy. I had to be incredibly careful when in school because I prepared sermons in class when I should do schoolwork or witnessed to classmates, which was not allowed in school. Mrs. Barbara Kershaw, Mr. O. D. DeShay, and Mr. Elroy Williams allowed me time to write sermons in class after schoolwork especially if I preached the upcoming Sunday. DeShay and Williams were close friends of my family and deacons at their churches. Mrs. Kershaw was a long-time educator in Bastrop who taught my older siblings and was a family friend as well.

Being a boy preacher, my pastor and my parents guarded my time. I was not allowed to preach revivals out of town during the school year and regardless of how far I preached out on a Sunday I had to be in school the next day. Several of my friends either had too many days of school to make up or dropped out of school due to their busy preaching schedules. I believed that this was my path until my mother reminded me otherwise. I went to school, but I did not like it, and only did enough in school to pass to be eligible to play sports. My preaching was my only concern, and I thought that having a halfway decent message enabled me to make it on my preaching alone. Things got so bad that my mother threatened to take me out of public school and enroll me in Hyde Park, a

private Christian school in Austin. I went through a rebellious stage in my life and to top it off my father was not around. For three years my father failed to come around. His wife gave him so much hell that he tried not to cause waves in his home when it came to me. All that changed when he told her she had to live with his mess, but his kids were not a mistake. My grades improved during this time, and I got my first job at Howard Edward Butt grocery store when turning sixteen. I also was involved in a near-drowning accident that almost claimed my life. Had I drowned like my brother seven years earlier my mother would have died from a broken heart.

As time drew near for me to finish high school I was ordained. My pastor did not want me to leave for college until I was ordained. Me and my cousin BaSean Jackson talked for many days about going to Morehouse and then to ITC. He was the one to succeed in this as my path went in a different direction. The Texas Education Agency had a state-mandated test that students must pass to graduate, and I failed the math section by one measly point, thereby preventing me from graduating with my class in 1993. Since I was not a graduate, my counselor advised me to enroll back in school and take four periods of math courses for enrichment purposes. I retook the TAAS test in October and passed, finally becoming a high school graduate. While having the option to receive my diploma at that time, my choice was to wait until June of 1994 to wear my cap and gown and be proud of my accomplishment.

When my twin sister went off to college it was lonely, and I cried uncontrollably out of her sight when she left. Although she was only thirty miles away in Austin attending Huston-Tillotson College (now University) there was an emptiness I could never escape and I suffered from separation anxiety. As she studied education to become

a schoolteacher, God prepared me to shepherd God's flock as interest came from South Texas. Texas is a wonderful place to pastor, but South Texas is the last frontier of serving as a pastor.

My cousins live in the South Texas town of Carrizo Springs and are members of a church in nearby Crystal City. As they were in pastoral transition, my cousin Alma was on the committee searching for the next pastor. There was also the church in Carrizo Springs searching for a pastor. While the church in Carrizo Springs failed to have a formal search committee it was on the recommendation of my cousin that the two churches chose Ron Moore or myself. While my first chance to be a pastoral candidate was at the Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Crystal City, it was the Macedonia Baptist Church of Carrizo Springs who extended the call to me in November 1993 at the age of eighteen.

Pastoring Macedonia was an uphill battle versus an uphill journey; it was a battle because there was a daily struggle to become her pastor. I was young, vibrant, and wanted things they failed to desire or had the resources to get. A lot of my issues with pastoring my first church was I attempted to use the weight of authority I saw my pastor and other pastors use. Just because you have the title does not mean you have the authority; especially if you are a novice. This was a baptism by fire and an experience where I realized people belong to God, and not the pastor.

Directly after my first meeting with the church, a recent college graduate wanted to meet with me. In that meeting, the young lady took out her wallet, showed me her college diploma, and proceeded to tell me until I got a college degree there was no way I could be her pastor. She was also a scorned woman hurt by a previous relationship and was hopeful she and I would be an item. Since I showed no interest in her advances, she

rallied the church not to listen to anything I presented or had to say. They were a church that had no written history, and few can recall their beginning. They became a mission church under the First Baptist Church of Carrizo Springs because the eight-mile drive to Crystal City every Sunday became too much for them. History was made with me becoming the very first pastor to move to the city. My salary was \$75.00 per month and then raised to \$200.00 per month shortly after my installation. I never missed a meal or a bill on this salary. The school district employed me as a substitute teacher and later worked for First Baptist Church as a janitor.

A couple of years after being in Carrizo Springs as a single pastor, I dated the daughter of a friend of mine who briefly became my fiancé until she cheated on me with my first wife's cousin. It sounds complicated, but I met my first wife through my ex-girlfriend. I had to mature quickly because when I got married, I had to raise a four-year-old son as my own. He is now thirty-one and gave me two beautiful grandchildren. My time in Carrizo Springs concluded in 1996 after becoming the pastor of the Greater Mt. Olive Baptist Church of Del Rio—my first wife's home church. While the members of Macedonia thought I was called to Greater Mount Olive due to my upcoming marriage to one of their members there was no secret God was in the middle of the assignment. Leading this church afforded me opportunities to focus on broader ministries and denominational work. Greater Mount Olive was a church that believed the pastor should be compensated and taken care of regularly. The members of this church were either on active duty or retired from the air force. This pastorate lasted until 2002 when the Lord moved me to the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church in Beeville. When arriving in Del Rio, I was twenty-one years old, and by then failed to fully mature as a man; it is not that

I did foolish things, but I started missing many of the things people that age do. Life was not fun for me because it was all business, and I never took the time for recreation. While seeing others at this age at the height of their life, I led a church; it is not that I failed to love it but wanted more. Enjoying my life and freedom came after my divorce at the age of twenty-two.

All of this changed after meeting Dawn Polk at the National Sunday School and BTU Congress in Cincinnati, Ohio. I knew she was older but liked her a lot and she liked me. She said I was mature for my age. We were friends until we started dating, and then got married. When asking Dawn for her hand in marriage, I still pastored in Del Rio, and my ex-wife still actively attended the church. I was ready to face the music of pastoring a wife and an ex-wife, but the Lord sent me to Beeville to become pastor of the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church. Upon arriving at Bethlehem, my faith and fortitude would be tested, and God proved to be faithful. It was at Bethlehem that I experienced my maturity as a man and a pastor. Leaving the “ease in Zion” of Del Rio placed me in the, “there” of Beeville, and I believe without a doubt God sent me to Beeville.

Synergy

When looking at other pastors who started young it was always a concern of mine if I started pastoring at the wrong season in my life or rushed into wanting to pastor and not waiting on God. From all I endured through life and ministry, spiritually I am stronger because it takes some things to knock you to your knees to get you back on your feet. Trials make you humble and stronger while giving you much to shout about. The struggles of my life allowed me to be bold and face anything head-on without fear. That

which used to break me now makes me better and not bitter. Men take the initiative of leadership and problem solving while boys make excuses. As a pastor and minister, I became appreciative of my assignment because I failed to arrive where I am overnight, and there is always someone who wants to be where you are. Bethlehem may not be a megachurch with millions of dollars, but she is a church God equipped me to serve.

I desire that the locals understand the seriousness of the call to preach and to the pastor. From what I witnessed in recent developments is young preachers growing tired, giving up, and going to greener pastures only to find out that you cannot run away from problems in leadership. What I seek to learn through this doctoral project is a young preacher/pastor need to mature in the leadership role of a senior pastor. This maturity can only be experienced by leading in a transformative manner.

My desire is to share my experience with those who are willing to listen and the lesson that “the weight is worth the wait.” This means that the weight of leadership is worth waiting to lead. If having a workshop or symposium of pastors who started preaching and pastoring early to discuss their experiences of maturity or lack thereof, then there will be a greater chance of clergy to maintain strength and stability in pastoral leadership.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Fellowship and engagement are a vital part of the local church. With both intact and active, the local church regardless of size can exhibit the spirit of unity in glorifying God. One of the many challenges in pastoral ministry is knowing the people you pastor. However, there is another challenge churches face, getting to know each other. Much of the pastor's time and attention will be consumed by issues relating to America's diversity, especially the underclass, and the struggle to establish a true national community.¹ The worship experience on any given Sunday is not enough time to fellowship and engage. Routinely, after the benediction worshippers tend to find the nearest exit and will not return until the following week. Dr. Jamison Hunter mentions this as a traditional worship with no transformation.² According to George McCalep, fellowship and engagement between church members is needed for maximum church growth.³

The biblical text selected to support the following project regarding, “Transforming Leadership Cultivating Community Within the Church” is

¹ Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C. Taylor, *We Have This Ministry: The Heart of the Pastor's Vocation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996), 111.

² Jamison Hunter, *Beyond the Walls: Transforming Worshipers to Witnesses* (Pittsburgh, PA: Church Online, LLC, 2017) 17.

³ George O. McCalep, Jr., *Faithful Over A Few Things* (Lithonia, GA: Orman Press, 1996), 18.

Ephesians 4:1-6. Transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. This type of leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential.⁴ Ephesians gives us three images which help us think about the church. Two of these images are brought into focus in the midsection of Ephesians. The three images that are intended to give us a vision of who we are as Christ's church are those of a body, a family, and a holy temple. The three images share a common emphasis. Each reminds us again and again that we are one with our brothers and sisters, even as we are one with Christ. However, each of the images also has its own distinctive emphasis.

The biblical picture of the church as a body reminds us that we are called to a life of good works. Even as our own bodies act to carry out the intentions of our minds, so the body of Christ acts on earth to carry out the intentions of Jesus, our living Head. The biblical picture of the church as a family reminds us that we are called to a life of love. As the human family is the context for growth and intimacy, so the family of God is a context in which God's love is expressed to welcome each other and to help each other grow. The biblical picture of the church as a temple reminds us that we are called to a life of holiness. As a temple reminds us of the worship of God, our calling as a holy temple is to bring God praise and honor and glory.⁵

⁴ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2022), 186.

⁵ Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987), 919.

Introduction and Title

Ephesians is addressed to a group of believers who are rich beyond measure in Jesus Christ, yet living as beggars, and only because they are ignorant of their wealth. Since they have yet to accept their wealth, they relegate themselves to living as spiritual paupers. Paul begins by describing in chapters one through three the contents of the Christian's heavenly "bank account:" adoption, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness, wisdom, inheritance, the seal of the Holy Spirit, life, grace, citizenship – in short, every spiritual blessing. Drawing upon that huge spiritual endowment, the Christian has all the resources needed for living "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (1:6). Chapters four through six resemble an orthopedic clinic, where the Christian learns a spiritual walk rooted in his spiritual wealth. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (1 – 3) for good works, that we should walk in them" (2:10).

The traditional title of this epistle is *Pros Ephesios*, "To the Ephesians." Many ancient manuscripts, however, omit *en Epheso*, "in Ephesus," in chapter 1:1. This has led several scholars to challenge the traditional view that this message was directed specifically to the Ephesians. The encyclical theory proposes that it was a circular letter sent by Paul to the churches of Asia. It is argued that Ephesians is really a Christian treatise designed for general use: it involves no controversy and deals with no specific problems in any church. This is also supported by the formal tone and distant phraseology ("after I heard of your faith, "1:15; if they "have heard" of his message, 3:2). These things seem inconsistent with the relationship Paul had with the Ephesians after a ministry of almost three years among them. On the other hand, the absence of personal greetings is not a support for the encyclical theory because Paul would have done this to

avoid favoritism. The only letters that greet specific people are Romans and Colossians, and they were addressed to churches Paul had not visited. Some scholars accept an ancient tradition that Ephesians is Paul's letter to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16), but there is no way to be sure. If Ephesians began as a circular letter, it eventually became associated with Ephesus, the foremost of the Asian churches. Another plausible option is that this epistle was directly addressed to the Ephesians but written in such a way as to make it helpful for all the churches in Asia.

Author

All internal (1:1) and external evidence strongly support the Pauline authorship of Ephesians. In recent years, however, critics have turned to internal grounds to challenge this unanimous ancient tradition. It has been argued that the vocabulary and style are different from other Pauline Epistles, but this overlooks Paul's flexibility under different circumstances (cf. Romans and 2 Corinthians). The theology of Ephesians in some ways reflects a later development, but this must be attributed to Paul's growth and meditation on the church as the body of Christ. Since the epistle names the author in the opening verse, it is not necessary to theorize that Ephesians was written by one of Paul's pupils or admirers, such as Timothy, Luke, Tychicus, or Onesimus.⁶

Date and Setting

At the end of his second missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus where he left Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18: 18 – 21). This strategic city was the commercial center of

⁶ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru The Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 400.

Asia Minor, but heavy silting required a special canal to be maintained so that ships could reach the harbor. Ephesus was a religious center as well, famous especially for its magnificent temple of Diana (Roman name) or Artemis (Greek name), a structure considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (cf. Acts 19:35). The practice of magic and the local economy were related to this temple. Paul remained in Ephesus for nearly three years on his third missionary journey (Acts 19; 20:30); the Word of God was spread throughout the province of Asia. Paul's effective ministry began to seriously hurt the traffic in magic and images, leading to an uproar in the huge Ephesian theater. Paul then left for Macedonia, but afterward he met with Ephesian elders while on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20: 17 – 38).⁷

Paul wrote the “Prison Epistles” (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) during his first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 60 – 62. These epistles all refer to his imprisonment (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Philippians 1:7, 13 – 14; Colossians 4: 3, 10, 18; Philemon 9 – 10, 13, 23) and fit well against the background in Acts 28: 16 – 31. This is especially true of Paul’s references to the “palace household” (Philippians 4:22). Some commentators believe that the imprisonment in one or more of these epistles refers to Paul’s Caesarean imprisonment or to a hypothetical Ephesian imprisonment, but the weight of evidence favors the traditional view that they were written in Rome. Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were evidently written about the same time (cf. Ephesians 6:21 – 22; Colossians 4: 7 – 9) in A.D. 60 – 61. Philippians was written in A.D. 62, not long before Paul’s release.⁸

⁷ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru The Bible*, 401.

⁸ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru The Bible*, 401.

Survey of Ephesians

Paul wrote this epistle to make Christians more aware of their position in Christ and to motivate them to draw upon their spiritual source in daily living: “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (4:1; 2:10). The first half of Ephesians lists the believer’s heavenly possessions: adoption, redemption, inheritance, power, life, grace, citizenship, and the love of Christ. There are no imperatives in chapters one through three, which focus only on divine gifts. Chapters four through six include thirty-five directives in the last half of Ephesians that speak of the believer’s responsibility to conduct himself according to his individual calling. So, Ephesians begins in heaven but concludes in the home and in all other relationships of daily life. The two divisions are: the position of the Christian (1:1 – 3:21) and the practice of the Christian (4:1 – 6:20).

The theme of Ephesians is the believer’s responsibility to walk in accordance with his heavenly calling in Christ Jesus (4:1). Ephesians was not written to correct specific errors in a local church, but to prevent problems in the church by encouraging the body of Christ to mature in Him. It was also written to make believers more aware of their position in Christ because this is the basis for their practice on every level of life.⁹

Main Idea

Due to God’s great plan of salvation and the believers’ new identity in Christ, Paul begins a series of admonitions for the readers. He appeals to them to maintain the unity that already exists in the one body God has created. This unity is an essential and

⁹ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru The Bible*, 402.

natural by-product of the common faith they confess, but it must also be maintained through developing the social virtues associated with selfless love.¹⁰

Exegesis

Ephesians 4: 1 – 6

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.¹¹

At first look, the Apostle Paul uses a word which is described as humble, and conjunctive. The word “therefore” is one of the few words used in the Bible which turns to exhortation of Christian ethics. Paul did not begin with the moral demands of the Christian life. The first three chapters of Ephesians are a memorial of God’s acts, God’s drama of salvation. Only after the story of grace has been told in (2:5) does Paul venture to voice the obligations of response.

Ephesians chapter four spells out the heart of Paul’s theology, unity in Christ. Although Ephesians is primarily concerned with the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, Paul’s emphasis extends to other relationships as well. Unity should thoroughly saturate every facet of the believer’s life. Other Pauline letters, such as Romans and Galatians, share this distinct emphasis. This chapter not only gives us a vision of God’s intention for

¹⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 227.

¹¹ All biblical citations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, Ephesians 4:1-6, ESV.

the body of Christ, but also a unique glimpse into the apostle's heart.¹² In the New Testament, the coming of God in Christ means that the Kingdom of God expected in the Old Testament is now realized in Jesus of Nazareth. The Day of the Lord has come in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This day is no longer future but present in the man Jesus. In him is embodied God's Kingdom in which men are liberated. He is, as Paul says, the "New Adam," who has done for man what man could not do for himself. His death and resurrection mean that the decisive battle has been fought and won, and man no longer has to be a slave to "principalities and powers."

With him also comes a new people, which the New Testament calls the *ekklesia* (church). Like the people of Old Israel, they are called into being by God himself—to be his agent in this world until Christ's second coming. Like Old Israel, they are an oppressed people, created to cooperate in God's liberation of all men. Unlike Old Israel, their membership is not limited by ethnic or political boundaries but includes all who respond in faith to the redemptive act of God in Christ with a willingness to share in God's creative activity in the world. Unlike Old Israel, they do not look forward to the coming of the Kingdom but know that, in Christ, God's Kingdom has already come, and their very existence is a manifestation of it. The Church merely waits for its full consummation in Christ's second coming. Therefore, its sole purpose for being is to be a visible manifestation of God's work in the affairs of men. The Church, then, consists of people who have been seized by the Holy Spirit and who have the determination to live

¹² Derek R. Brown, Miles Custis, and Matthew M. Whitehead, *Ephesians*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Eph 4:1–16.

as if all depends on God. It has no will of its own, only God's will; it has no duty of its own, only God's duty. Its existence is grounded in God.¹³

The Christian life and lifestyle are said to be a calling. Paul is not thinking here of a call to ministry, though that is included in what he is talking about, but rather their calling simply to be Christians in a non-Christian environment once they heard the gospel and responded. With this calling came an exhortation to forsake the past ways and take on new ways, which Paul has already emphasized when he spoke of the “then” and “now” of the audience’s lives and of their calling in general in 1:18. He will continue this theme here.

Paul again repeats that he is in custody, thus stirring up pathos. This suggests that the audience needs to realize the seriousness and possible consequences of behaving in a Christian manner in a non-Christian world, but it also stirs the deeper emotions of the audience so they will be more ready to receive the wisdom imparted. Prisoners certainly do not normally issue authoritative exhortations to free persons, so we are dealing with an extraordinary person and an extraordinary situation.¹⁴ Paul reminds us of his right to talk to us in this way. He is in prison—for the Lord, and for the sake of his readers. He has earned the privilege, even the responsibility, of challenging us to a closer walk with God.

“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received (Eph. 4:1).” We do not use this old-fashioned word calling much anymore. Its equivalent is vocation, which suggests more than job or occupation. It connotes a divine appointment. All

¹³ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 54.

¹⁴ Ben Witherington, III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 284.

Christians have received God's call to be His people, His saints; that is our vocation. Jesus called tax collectors, fishermen, men and women of all walks of life to be something different in the world. No matter how they earned their living, they were really pursuing a divine calling that lifted them above the masses.

God has called all Christians. He has called us up to a higher standard of living, a more rigorous morality. Christians cannot be content with behaving like everybody else. The ways of the world are not our ways. We desire to live a more noble life. (This is easily misunderstood. More than one would-be Christian has hesitated to declare himself for Christ because of this or that imperfection in himself. He wants to improve himself first. His decision is well-meant but misguided, because by delaying, he forfeits the help of the Holy Spirit in walking the higher road. At least he understands that God calls us up).

A Christian may be called on, also. Like a physician who is on twenty-four-hour call, Christians are called on to be witnesses to the grace of Christ in their lives, and to be His servants, all the time. Our whole beings are given over to others. We may not like interruptions, but in a sense, a Christian's job is to be interrupted for the sake of people who need us.

We are called forth to battle. We are soldiers on alert. In the Middle Ages, Christians were summoned to holy crusades. Our battles, fortunately, are not martial but spiritual; nonetheless, we crusade for truth, righteousness, justice, and goodness. We are

prepared to do battle for our Lord. Christians are called out of the world to be different from the world for the sake of the world we live in.¹⁵

The admonition to live a life worthy of the calling you have received arises out of the gracious, saving purpose of God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20), which has been presented in the first three chapters. This appeal, like other Pauline ethical ‘imperatives,’ is grounded in the ‘indicatives’ of God’s saving work in Christ. It is a comprehensive exhortation (cf. 1 Thess. 2:12; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10; 3:17) which covers every aspect of the readers’ lives and stands as the ‘topic’ sentence over what follows. The subsequent admonitions throughout the exhortations amplify what is involved in walking worthily of this calling.

Within Ephesians the apostle has already used the language of ‘walking’ to describe the readers’ former lifestyle in sin and death (2:1–2; cf. v. 3) and then, by contrast, in relation to the good works God has prepared for them to walk in (v. 10). Now, at the beginning of the exhortatory material in chapters four through six, this significant motif appears again, as the readers are admonished to lead a life that is in conformity with the calling, they have received, and it continues like a scarlet thread through the next two chapters (4:17; 5:2, 8, 15).

Elsewhere in the Pauline letters ‘calling’ refers to God’s drawing men and women into fellowship with his Son through the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:9; Rom. 8:30), or into his kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:12). Here in Ephesians, by admonishing the readers to live worthily of the calling with which they have been called Paul is reminding

¹⁵ LeRoy Lawson, *Galatians, Ephesians: Unlocking the Scriptures for You* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Bible Studies, 1987), 197–198.

them of the prior action of God in their midst. As believers they have already been called into the blessings of salvation (1:3–14) with its wonderful hope (1:18). They have been united with Christ in his resurrection and exaltation so that they now share in his rule over the new creation (1:20–22; 2:6). Both Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled to God by the death of Christ and called into the one new humanity (2:13–16). They have become members of God’s household, the new temple in the Lord (2:15, 19, 21) and have freedom of access to the Father by one Spirit (2:18). As those who have been called into one body, the church (cf. Col. 3:15), they have a divinely ordained role in God’s purposes for the cosmos (Eph. 3:10). God’s gracious calling not only bestows great privileges on them; it also carries with it solemn responsibilities. His election and predestination of them for adoption into his family (1:4, 5), together with his preparing good works beforehand for them to walk in (2:10), do not remove the responsibility of their heeding the apostolic injunction. They are expected to respond to the divine initiatives, and God’s calling establishes the norm or criterion to which their conduct should conform. The subsequent admonitions, which fill out in greater detail their responsibilities, are set within this framework of an appeal that is grounded in the gospel of salvation which they have received.¹⁶

The admonition to live worthily of the divine calling is now more clearly explained as being a life characterized by the graces of humility, gentleness, patience, and loving forbearance, as the readers make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Significantly, relationships within the body of Christ, especially conduct characterized by harmony, are the first issue Paul addresses as an essential

¹⁶ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 275–276.

element in their living consistently with this calling. It is not until verse seventeen, where the language of ‘walking’ is deliberately picked up again, that life in Christ is contrasted with that of outsiders.

The exhortation of verse one continues not with imperatives but with two prepositional phrases (‘with all humility and gentleness, with patience’) and two participial clauses which function as imperatives (‘bear with one another in love’ and ‘make every effort to keep the unity’). These admonitions ‘lead in an ascending line to the goal to be aimed for—preserving unity’ (v. 3).

The three graces ‘humility,’ ‘gentleness,’ and ‘patience,’ together with the notions of ‘bearing with one another’ and ‘love,’ all appear in the similar positive exhortatory material of Colossians 3:12–15, although in Ephesians they function as the necessary graces without which the aim of the exhortation, namely, to maintain the unity of the body, would not be achieved. In effect, the readers are being urged to cultivate the graces that were seen in perfection in Christ. Most occur in the ninefold list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 and exemplify the reconciliation that has been won for the readers through Christ’s death (Eph. 2:14–18).¹⁷

The first two graces, ‘with all humility and gentleness,’ are closely related: they are joined by the one preposition ‘with,’ while the ‘all,’ which is characteristic of Paul’s style in Ephesians, is applied to both nouns and underscores how necessary he considers these ethical qualities to be in the lives of his readers. ‘Humility, lowliness,’ as is well known, occurred in Greek literature generally on only a few occasions, and then usually in the derogatory sense of servility, weakness, or a shameful lowliness. In the Old

¹⁷ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 276.

Testament, however, the adjective ‘lowly or humble’ and its cognates occur more than 250 times, often in contexts which speak of the Lord bringing down the proud and arrogant, and exalting the lowly or poor whose trust is in him. In the New Testament the noun signifies the ‘lowness’ with which one serves the Lord, as Paul did when his ministry was conducted among the Ephesians ‘with great humility’ (Acts 20:19), or is submissive to other Christians (Phil. 2:3; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 5:5). The pattern or model is Jesus, who invited people to come to him as the one who was ‘meek and lowly in heart’ (Matt. 11:29). The twin themes of humiliation and exaltation, noted in the Old Testament, come to their clearest expression in the hymn of Philippians 2:6–11, where it is stated that Jesus humbled himself to death on a cross, and God exalted him (v. 9) by bestowing on him the name above all others. Christ’s action in humbling himself is the pattern for believers, who in humility are to esteem others better than themselves and to be concerned about others’ welfare (v. 4).¹⁸

‘Gentleness’ or ‘meekness,’ in its adjectival form, designated the poor and oppressed in the Old Testament, who in their deep need humbly sought help from the Lord. ‘Meekness’ was one of the marks of Jesus’ rule. He fulfilled the role of the messianic king who brought salvation without using force (Matt. 21:5; cf. Zech. 9:9), describing himself as meek and lowly of heart (Matt. 11:29). Paul mentions the ‘meekness of Christ’ as characteristic of Jesus’ behavior toward human beings during his life on earth, and he exhorts the Corinthians based on this example (2 Cor. 10:1). ‘Meekness’ is to characterize the lives of Christians in relation to fellow-believers who have sinned (Gal. 6:1, 2, by bearing one another’s burdens they ‘fulfill the law of Christ;’

¹⁸ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 277.

2 Tim. 2:25; cf. 1 Cor. 4:21). It is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), standing in lists of graces as a concrete expression of Christian love (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11; 1 Pet. 3:4). This gentleness is not to be confused with weakness (as contemporary Graeco-Roman thought regarded it) but has to do with consideration for others and a willingness to waive one's rights.¹⁹

The third grace, ‘long-suffering,’ appears in both Old and New Testaments to describe the ‘patience’ of God with his people (esp. Exod. 34:6). Because of his forbearance with them, they ought to act in a similar manner towards others (cf. the parable of the wicked servant, Matt. 18:23–35; 1 Thess. 5:14). In some contexts, this word can signify ‘steadfastness’ or ‘forbearance,’ and this is its sense here, given that the following clause, ‘bearing with one another in love,’ amplifies what is meant by it. ‘Patience’ is that long-suffering which makes allowance for others’ shortcomings and endures wrong rather than flying into a rage or desiring vengeance. It is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and a necessary quality for maintaining right relationships within the body of Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 5:14; 1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 6:6).²⁰

Paul’s exhortation continues with the following participles, ‘bearing [with one another]’ and ‘making every effort’ (v. 3), each of which functions as an imperative. The first clarifies the meaning of ‘patience.’ Mutual forbearance is the practical expression of patience. As believers bear with one another’s weaknesses and failures (cf. 4:32) during tensions and conflicts, they show a lifestyle that is consistent with their divine calling. This kind of behavior can spring only from God’s love—a point that is made plain by the

¹⁹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 277-278.

²⁰ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 278.

additional words in love. The apostle has just prayed to God that his readers might be rooted and established in love (3:17). Now he addresses his urgent appeal to them to live accordingly.

The apostle has urged his readers to display humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love since they are necessary to achieve the aim of the exhortation: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).” Without these graces which are essential to their life together, they would have no hope of maintaining the unity of the Spirit, a unity in the body of Christ about which Paul is deeply concerned. This second participial clause (‘making every effort …’) is stylistically parallel to the previous one, and functions as an imperative.

Paul’s appeal is urgent and cannot be easily translated into English. The verb he uses has an element of haste, urgency, or even a sense of crisis to it, and has been rendered by Barth as: “Yours is the initiative! Do it now!”²¹ Further, the exhortation is an unusual one. The church’s unity is described as the unity of the Spirit, which signifies a unity that God’s Spirit creates and therefore not the readers’ own achievement, yet they are exhorted urgently to maintain it. God has inaugurated this unity in Christ, through the events described in Ephesians 2:11–22, as a result of which believers, Jew and Gentile together, have access to God ‘in one Spirit’ (2:18). In the following verses, this unity, which includes Jew-Gentile relations in the body of Christ but is not limited to them, is underscored by a series of acclamations of oneness, which means that it is as ‘indestructible as God himself.’ Ultimately, the unity and reconciliation that have been won through Christ’s death (2:14–18) are part and parcel of God’s intention of bringing

²¹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 279.

all things together into unity in Christ (1:9, 10). Since the church has been designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness and the pattern on which the reconciled universe of the future will be modelled, believers are expected to live in a manner consistent with this divine purpose. To keep this unity must mean to maintain it visibly. If the unity of the Spirit is real, it must be transparently evident, and believers have a responsibility before God to make sure that this is so. To live in a manner which mars the unity of the Spirit is to do despite to the gracious reconciling work of Christ. It is tantamount to saying that his sacrificial death by which relationships with God and others have been restored, along with the resulting freedom of access to the Father, are of no real consequence to us!²²

The ‘unity of the Spirit’ is to be maintained ‘in the bond of peace,’ that is, in the bond which consists of peace. Although the phrase has been understood instrumentally (cf. NIV’s through the bond of peace), so that peace, which has a bonding effect, is the means by which the addressees will maintain and show forth the unity of the Spirit. It is preferable on grounds of Pauline usage and sequence within this context to regard the phrase as locative, signifying that peace is the bond in which their unity is kept. Accordingly, as the readers heed the apostolic injunction to bend every effort to maintain their oneness in the local congregation(s) as well as in their wider relationships with other believers, the peace Christ has won, and which binds Jews and Gentiles together into the one people of God will be increasingly evident in their lives.

In verses four through six, the apostle, however, is not speaking of unity at any price in which the fundamental truths of the gospel are jettisoned. As a strong motivation

²² O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 280.

for his appeal for unity he presents a series of seven acclamations, each using the word ‘one,’ in which the readers are reminded of the fundamental unities on which the Christian faith and life are based. This theological undergirding begins without any linking conjunction or verb in verse four as the apostle moves from exhortation (vv. 1–3) to assertion. The motifs of one body and one Spirit are declaratory, yet they have the force of an appeal. The sevenfold list is basically threefold since three of these unities allude to the three persons of the Trinity, while the remaining four refer to believers’ relationship to the Spirit, Son, and Father.²³

It has been argued that Paul is citing an early Christian confession or creed. This is possible but unlikely. The order (Spirit, Lord, and God) is quite different from that of the early confessions (Father, Son, and Spirit), while several clauses point rather to an ad hoc creation. So, for example, the expression ‘even as you were called in one hope of your calling’ (v. 4) is not the usual credal style but is characteristic of Paul’s own expressions. The most that can legitimately be claimed, then, is that Paul may have utilized some items of credal material as he stresses the need for unity.

The immediate context explains the reason for the Spirit being mentioned before the Father and the Son (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4–6). Paul has just exhorted his readers to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). The theological basis for that exhortation comes from Ephesians chapter two: “through Christ both Jewish and Gentile believers have been reconciled ‘in one body’ (2:16) and have been granted access to the Father ‘in one Spirit’ (2:18).” The apostle now turns to the fact that there is but one

²³ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 280.

Spirit, and only later in the series does he mention one Lord and one God and Father of all.

The context also explains the order of the first two items body, and Spirit. The one body is mentioned first, for this is the apostle's primary concern in these exhortations. This body is the church, Christ's body (1:23), which comprises Jewish and Gentile believers alike. It is the heavenly gathering, assembled around Christ, in which believers now participate. That body of Christ is, by definition, one. Each congregation is a local manifestation of this heavenly entity, not a part of it. So, although the apostle is writing about the one body which is in heaven, all that he says applies also to each local congregation, for it is here that the unity of the body is visible. The one Spirit brings unity and cohesion to the body by his indwelling and animating activity (v. 3). "By the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. Rom. 8:9). Believers are members of the body by virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit. And as there is only one body, so also there is only one Spirit.²⁴

The concluding clause of verse four, "just as you were called in the one hope of your calling," is specifically linked to the 'topic' sentence of verse one with its general exhortation to the readers to live worthily of their calling, and it provides the framework for the rest of the paraenesis in the letter. Although the 'just as'-clause of verse four breaks the nicely balanced sequence, it functions as an envelope (*inclusio*) with its mention of calling, as Paul pointedly returns to what was already stated to make it more urgent. Now, however, the emphasis is upon the one hope that springs from the call. God's calling finds its origin in the choice of his people in Christ before the world's

²⁴ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 281.

foundation (Eph. 1:4) and becomes effective in their lives through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 8:30). When God calls believers into a relationship with Godself, He calls them to a particular hope (Eph. 1:18) which is sure and certain since it rests on his faithfulness—previously the Gentile readers had been separated from Christ and had no real hope (Eph. 2:12). It is sometimes called ‘the hope of the gospel’ (Col. 1:23) because it is held out in the saving message of the gospel, and ‘the hope of glory’ (1:27; Rom. 5:2), the expectation of appearing with Christ in glory when he is revealed (Col. 3:4) and of sharing in his glory. In Ephesians this hope is particularly expressed in terms of God’s gracious purpose of summing up and bringing together all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth (1:9–10). As a foretaste of this grand hope, the very existence of the church, a society of pardoned rebels, a multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body, is the means God uses to manifest his richly diverse wisdom to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realm. Thus, Paul reinforces his admonition by reminding his readers of the hope held out in their calling. A sense of expectancy, therefore, should motivate and unify their actions.²⁵

Having begun with a series of unities related to the work of the Holy Spirit, Paul continues without elaboration to the second triad, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (v. 5). This may have been a traditional baptismal affirmation, given the mention of baptism as the third member, and because faith in Jesus as the one Lord was usually the focus of baptismal confession (e.g., Acts 2:34–39; 19:5). However, one should not assume that such a confession was confined to this occasion.

²⁵ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 282.

Lord, which was the title for Yahweh in the Old Testament, was used in the acclamation of Jesus by early believers, even before Paul's conversion. Lord is a favorite title for Jesus in the apostle's letters, and Ephesians is no exception. He shares with other Christians the conviction that Jesus is Lord based on His resurrection and exaltation to the place of highest honor (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:3; Rom. 10:9; 14:8, 9; Phil. 2:9–11).

Already in Ephesians, where there are some twenty references to Jesus as Lord, the apostle has spoken of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one in whom every spiritual blessing comes (1:3; cf. v. 2), as the sphere in which faith is exercised (1:15), and as the one in whom God's new creation, the holy temple, is growing (2:21). God's eternal purpose has been accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord, while Paul exhorts the readers as one who is a "prisoner in the Lord" (4:1). Jesus is the Lord who fills the universe with his sovereign rule (1:23; cf. 4:10), and who as head has been given to the church (1:23; cf. 4:15, 16).

According to Gordon Fee, after the expression one Lord two 'entry' experiences are introduced: one faith and one baptism. The former is probably objective, as many commentators suppose, referring to the substance of one's faith (Jude 3), their common body of belief. This appears to be the meaning of 'faith' later in the chapter (v. 13). If, as is less likely, one faith is subjective, then it denotes the act or attitude of believing in Christ which is common to all members of the one body. Either way, it is true that Christians have one faith. In the context of Ephesians, there is not one faith for Jews and another for Gentiles (as Rom. 3:20 makes clear). There can be only one faith since there is only one Lord. Furthermore, there is only one baptism because there is one Lord Jesus Christ in whom believers are united, one body into which all Christians are incorporated. Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). Significantly,

baptism and unity are connected in Galatians 3:27, 28, as well as at 1 Corinthians 12:13.

The apostle is not making distinctions as to whether it is water baptism or baptism in the Spirit that is in view. The one without the other was an anomaly. However, much of Paul's teaching on baptism elsewhere in his epistles does not make sense unless the notion of spiritual union with Christ, at least, is in view (Rom. 6:3, 4; 1 Cor. 10:2; 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12; though cf. 1 Cor. 1:13–17; 15:29).²⁶

Finally, Paul's threefold acclamation reaches its climax as he praises the one God and Father of all for his universal rule and presence (v. 6). This acclamation, like that of 1 Corinthians 8:6 (itself a Christian reworking of the Shema of Deut. 6:4), characteristically acclaims the one God as Father, and then affirms his supreme transcendence overall and pervasive imminence, through all and in all. But how is the term 'all' to be interpreted: as masculine, so referring to people, or as neuter, denoting 'all things', that is, the universe?

- (1) Many interpreters regard the references to 'all' as masculine, thus denoting people, rather than neuter and signifying 'all things.' This is normally taken to denote 'all Christians', which in the context of Ephesians signifies both Jews and Gentiles, not 'all people' indiscriminately. The grounds for this view are threefold: first, in the context of a series of acclamations where the unity of the church is in view, it is claimed that what might have been an original cosmological formula is here related to members of the church. Secondly, in Paul's letters God is the 'Father' of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3) and of those who are in him, that is, Christians (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:2). The exception in Ephesians 3:15, where the vision is broadened to include the whole of creation, does not apply here, it is argued, since the '[Father] of all' is picked up in the expression 'each one of us' (v. 7), and this can only refer to members of the church. Finally, although some manuscripts read 'in us all' or 'in you all', the additional pronouns, which are generally conceded as a gloss, are nevertheless thought to be correct and recognize that it was only among Christians that God was confidently known as Father. On this interpretation, the apostle is stating that God is transcendent over all his children, that they are the instruments or agents through whom he works, and that they constitute his dwelling place in the Spirit.
- (2) However, a cosmic understanding of 'all' makes good sense in this context. First, at significant points in Ephesians where the sovereignty of God and Christ

²⁶ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 283–284.

are in view, ‘all’ denotes the whole universe (1:10, 11, 22, 23; 3:9; cf. 4:10). Secondly, in similar (confessional?) formulae within Paul’s letters (1 Cor. 8:6; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16) where different prepositions (e.g., ‘from’, ‘into’, ‘in’, ‘through’) are skillfully linked together in order to qualify God’s or Christ’s relationship to ‘all’, the word regularly signifies ‘everything’, not just persons or even believers. Thirdly, although there are formal affinities between Paul’s language and Stoic terminology, notably his use of ‘all’ and the play on prepositions by which the final unity of all that exists is expressed, the apostle’s ideas are very different from Stoic notions. They are, in fact, dependent on Old Testament statements about God, who fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:24), whose glory fills both temple and land, and whose power given to the Messiah is exercised over the whole of creation, not just believers (cf. Psalms 2, 8).²⁷

The real difficulty with this line of interpretation is that the expression ‘the Father of all’ refers to God as the Father of all creation, whereas Paul usually speaks of him as the Father of Jesus Christ and of those who are in him. However, in Ephesians 3:14–15 God is “the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.” He is the Creator of all living things, so that their existence and significance depend on Him.²⁸

In the beginning, Adam was placed in the garden to enjoy friendship and communion with God.²⁹ Fellowship and engagement in the Old Testament was also evident when God began to draw people into fellowship with Himself. Enoch is described as a man who walked with God (Gen. 5:22, 24). Noah, likewise, walked in communion with the Lord (Gen. 6:9). Abraham, the father of Israel, is called “the friend of God” (Jas. 2:23). No Old Testament saint had deeper fellowship with God than Moses during his

²⁷ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 284–285.

²⁸ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 274–286.

²⁹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Fellowship,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 789.

forty-day encounter with the Lord on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24). Later in Israel's history David wrote psalms that reflect a heart vitally in tune with the living God (Ps. 16; 34; 40; 63).³⁰

Psalms 133:1 also provides a copious reference to fellowship and engagement with others as it also brings glory to God. It is by this, unity is portrayed in a manner where hatred cannot exist, and harmony is perpetual. According to Howard Thurman, hatred often begins in a situation in which there is contact without fellowship, contact that is devoid of any of the primary overtures of warmth and fellow-feeling and authenticity. Dr. Thurman goes on to say, "there can be an abundance of sentimentality masquerading under the cloak of fellowship. It is easy to have fellowship on your own terms and to repudiate it if your terms are not acceptable."³¹ This simply means fellowship is not one-sided, and there is never an attitude of agony or antagonism when the fellowship is not favoring an individual.

To live together in peace, love, concord and mutual agreement, not only in occasional meetings, but all through the course of our lives, is indeed a great blessing and is very pleasing to our heavenly Father.³² On this interpretation in Ephesians 4:1-6 Paul is affirming that God is supremely transcendent over everything and that his immanence is all-pervasive: he works "through all and in all." If this latter understanding is correct, then God's universal sovereignty and presence are set forth as the climactic ground for the unity of the Spirit that believers are to maintain. His universal rule is being exercised to fulfil his ultimate purpose of unifying all things in Christ. The unity of the church is

³⁰Beitzel, "Fellowship," 789.

³¹ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 65.

³² Keith Brooks, *Summarized Bible: Complete Summary of the Old Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 138.

the means by which the manifold wisdom of God is being displayed to the universe. The church is the eschatological outpost, the pilot project of God's purposes, and his people are the expression of this unity that displays to the universe his final goal.³³

Summary

As stated in the introduction, fellowship and engagement are a vital part of the local church. Neither can be done effectively without the willingness of the pastoral leader. The seasons of pastoral ministry would suggest in the highs and lows of leadership there is a proclivity of complacency. When there is complacency from the leadership, there will also be complacency from the laity. Bishop Joseph Walker says, "Transformative leadership is not about being perfect, nor is it about pretending to be something we are not, it is about putting effort toward being our best selves and bringing that effort forward every day to inspire someone."³⁴

The purpose of study for this passage hinges on its focus of church unity. While it is clear the words "fellowship" or "engagement" are not mentioned in Ephesians 4:1-6, I believe the words are alluded to in the text. The Apostle Paul makes a passionate plea for those on the inside of the church to have longsuffering, patience, meekness, and humility so their witness of Christ would be valid. The danger of a church who is unfamiliar or bickering with one another internally will never be able to express to love of the Lord to a bickering world externally.

Henry Blackaby refers to fellowship 'koinonia' as the practical expression of God's love toward His people. It is where God's love is manifest in real life.

³³ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 286.

³⁴ Joseph W. Walker, *Leadership and Loneliness* (Nashville, TN: Zion Publishing, 2021), 90.

Koinonia is agape love in action. It is how we experience the fullness of God's love for His people and in His people. In a real sense koinonia is the essence of God's great salvation. Blackaby goes on to say 'koinonia' is the essence of the church. True koinonia, in its fullest expression, can only be found in the local church. Nowhere else is God's love displayed and experienced more deeply than in the midst of His people as they gather together. God delights to His children gathering for worship. To watch believers walk with one another, helping each member to grow into Christlikeness. To observe people from different backgrounds and with different interests joining with one heart to serve their common Lord. God is honored when a church demonstrates to a watching world the love that comes from Him.³⁵

Involvement and connection within local churches should not be divided by race or culture. Over the last two or three decades, I believe churches in America have seen diverse congregations but remain separated in terms of fellowship and unity. I agree with Cone when he says the church is a fellowship and must not contain any trace of racism. The true Church of Christ must define clearly through its members the meaning of God's act in Christ so that all may know what the Church is up to. There can be no doubt in the minds of its members regarding the nature of its community and its purpose in the world. It must be a community that has accepted Christ's acceptance of us, and in this sense, it must be holy.³⁶

³⁵ Henry T. Blackaby, *Experiencing God Together* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishing, 2002), 31.

³⁶ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 55.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The historical emphasis will center around fellowship and engagement within the local church to be an influential part of the greater community. The hypothesis is if the local church participates in a family Bible study and have fellowship with one another the members will have a better understanding of what it means to be a unified body of Christ. The research topic will focus on the leadership and membership of the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church in Beeville, Texas, and its legitimate attempt to know one another internally. From a biblical perspective, the research topic magnifies the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter four, because of God's great plan of salvation and the believers' new identity in Christ, Paul begins a series of admonitions for the readers. He appeals to them to maintain the unity that already exists in the one body God has created. This unity is an essential and natural by-product of the common faith they confess, but it must also be maintained through developing the social virtues associated with selfless love.¹

The Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church has been known for arriving at events within the walls, but not identifying one with another. This has led to the lack of unity internally resulting in apathy, and absence of effective inreach. Dietrich Bonhoeffer provides historical significance on what it means to be in the Body of Christ, and part of

¹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 227.

the visible church community. The experience Bethlehem witnessed from other races uniting with the church over the past eight to ten years would benefit them from knowing about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and his commitment to the cause of Christ. In the year of 2010 there was a meeting held with key leaders from Bethlehem, and field representatives from Texas Baptists. The representatives shared information about Beeville's impendent growth in population, and the necessity for a predominately black church to prepare for what was to come. The information also encourages Bethlehem to embrace an influx of people coming from other denominational backgrounds. This chapter will chronicle Bonhoeffer's life and his belief that Christianity centers around Jesus and is experienced within the communion of others.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has become known as a mystique man, and a legend in his own right. His life commands intense interest because of his opposition to the Nazi state and its infiltration of the German church. His theological works remain a source of inspiration not only for his vivid exposition of profound issues, but also for the well-turned phrases such as "cheap grace" or "world come of age." His involvement in the ecumenical movement as a young theologian brought immense respect from older and better-known men. There is some debate relative to him being interpreted correctly, but no one doubts that he has had a remarkable influence in contemporary Protestant Theology.²

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer was born February 4, 1906, in Breslau, Germany along with his twin sister Sabine. His mother Paula was a descendent of the famous nineteenth century

² Dallas M. Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1972), 13.

church historian, Karl von Hase, and his father, Karl Ludwig Bonhoeffer, was a noted physician and professor at the University of Berlin. The fact that his father distrusted Freudian psychoanalysis may be the explanation for his own barbs at psychotherapists and existentialists. The Bonhoeffer family was constantly surrounded by friends and neighbors of great distinction as frequent visitors such as church historian Adolf von Harnack, theologian Ernst Troeltsch often visited the Bonhoeffer household which possibly sparked the flame of intellectual pursuance in young Dietrich. He became a believer in God at a very early age and decided to enter the ministry at the tender age of sixteen. His parents said very little about this decision and his brothers were openly opposed to it as if dashing cold water on a fire that impossibly could not be extinguished. One brother, Klaus shared his deep regrets with Dietrich that he would be willing to give his life to a superfluous cause. However, Bonhoeffer resolved this pitiful regret and attempted discouragement by saying to his brother, “If the Church is feeble, I shall reform it.”³ This was his ministerial passion of the needs of people and the church. Karl, another brother, talked with him about science and the universe it held up to behold, but at this point Bonhoeffer would have nothing to do with science. The insistence of his brother Karl became so intense and heated until he simply commented and concreted his convictions by saying emphatically, “You may knock my block off, but I shall still believe in God.”⁴

It was not until the years of his imprisonment that he seriously began to come to terms with science. This is one reason his works on the Letters and Papers often sound so

³ Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), 45.

⁴ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 14.

radical and revolutionary. Studying theology was a determination he had since he was thirteen years old. Bonhoeffer began his study at Tübingen, but after a year moved to the University of Berlin in 1924. Switching colleges after a year or two was common in Germany. He had never planned to stay in Tübingen more than a year. He would study in Berlin seven semesters. At Berlin, he encountered a galaxy of erudite but often liberal scholars. It was at this institution the scholarship of the professors that mentored him contributed to his success in New Testament studies, and the history of the early church. This was made possible from the wealth of knowledge given by Adolf Deissmann, and Hans Lietzmann. Adolf von Harnack, Karl Holl, and Reinhold Seeberg were in one way, or another connected with theology. Seeberg would serve as Bonhoeffer's ministerial mentor as he worked closely with him for the licentiate of theology, a degree comparable to the Doctor of Theology. As a student, Bonhoeffer was not considered to be self-absorbed, but independent. He would read, absorb and colloquially speaking, "eat the fish, but spit out the bones" simply not absorbing the liberalism of Berlin, nor becoming a disciple of theologian Karl Barth with whom he had respect and admiration.⁵ All that he did was well as he provided his own flavor and taste with interpretation, preparation, and application on what he digested without twisting his convictions.

Bonhoeffer came to his own as a church theologian and ethicist in Germany under the rule of Adolf Hitler. To understand Bonhoeffer's powerful witness, one needs to briefly survey the German situation in the early twentieth century.⁶ Fortunately, Bonhoeffer was an independent thinker. In addition, he was deeply involved with the

⁵ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 14.

⁶ J. Deotis Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King* (Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox Press, 2005), 9.

ecumenical movement. Bonhoeffer was as much an ethicist as he was a theologian. As an ethicist, he carefully thought out his own views and course of action.⁷

At the end of the First World War, there was much suffering on the part of the German people. Harsh terms were imposed by the countries that won the war. The Versailles Treaty reclaimed much German land, limited Germany's army to one hundred thousand men, deprived Germany of colonies, and prevented Germany from uniting with Austria. In addition, Germany was forced to accept the "war guilt clause." This meant the acceptance of responsibility for the war and the repayment of reparations to other nations.⁸

As a result of these measures, Germans willingly embraced nationalism. They were willing to defend their country at all costs. Many Germans were looking for scapegoats to blame for their troubles. It only required a "leader" to inflame these deeply felt emotions. It was not too difficult for Hitler, an evil messiah-like figure, to fuel this anger. He seized upon a long tradition of anti-Semitism and blamed the Jews for Germany's woes. He used the false notion of racial purity to rally non-Jewish Germans against Jewish friends and neighbors.⁹ The racial tensions in Germany and Hitler's insistence of being a dictator led Bonhoeffer to feel a heavy burden of being a voice for civil rights and unity.

In 1927, he submitted his dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio: A Dogmatic Investigation of the Sociology of the Church*, to the faculty of the University of Berlin. This work was praised perpetually as what Karl Barth would express a "theological

⁷ Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King*, 42.

⁸ Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King*, 9.

⁹ Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King*, 10.

miracle” and was published three years later.¹⁰ *Sanctorum Communio* or using the English title, “The Communion of Saints” was Bonhoeffer’s first and most difficult work. This dissertation was his attempt to relate sociology and theology to one another. Sociology is defined as “the science of the structures of empirical communities.”¹¹ An empirical community is one that can be viewed objectively. Bonhoeffer aimed then to study the church from the standpoint of sociology. If, however, one is to understand a religious community, one must examine it from within, taking claims of the community seriously. Without assuming this internal stance, the church cannot be understood at all.¹²

In setting forth basic principles, Bonhoeffer declares that “only the concept of revelation can lead to the Christian concept of the church.”¹³ He rejects as untenable the explanation that a concept of “the Holy” leads to community. Accepting the revelatory nature of the church, he briefly sketches the New Testament view of the church. The significance of this lies in the conviction that equates the two statements “to be in Christ” and “to be in the church.” This equation means that “Christ is also at all times a real presence for the church, for it is Christ’s body, and the people are members of this body, or members of Christ himself.”¹⁴ Bonhoeffer does not mean that a second incarnation takes place but that “we must think of a form of revelation, Christ existing as church-

¹⁰ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 15.

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1986), 30.

¹² Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 30.

¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 134.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 139.

community.”¹⁵ The church so understood brings together many people, is a community, and has unity, although it is not without conflict of wills.

Regardless of sin and man’s alienation in the primal state, God’s purpose for man is in the church.¹⁶ The isolation of man from man and from God is nullified in the life and death of Christ. Repentance becomes the avenue of entry into the new community and the exit out of the community of Adam. The new community is unlike other communities in that the Holy Spirit lives in it. In this new community, the church, believers are not only reconciled to God but also to one another. The barriers of division, hostility, and isolation that marked humanity’s fall are torn down in Christ. Through Jesus’ atoning work, the alienation from God that began in the Garden of Eden is reversed, and humanity is brought into restored fellowship. The Church becomes a living, breathing organism – more than a mere assembly of individuals. It is a spiritual family united by faith in Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This divine presence transforms the Church into a unique community, one in which the love, grace, and unity of the Triune God are continually manifest. No other community in the world shares this distinctive quality, for it is the Holy Spirit who knits the body of believers together in perfect harmony.

In this sacred space, each member is empowered and equipped to live out their divine purpose. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, just as a human body has many parts working together in unison, so does the body of Christ – the church. Each believer is given unique spiritual gifts to serve the body and to advance God’s kingdom. Repentance is not just a one-time act, but an ongoing process that continually renews and transforms

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 141.

¹⁶ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 33.

the individual and community. Through repentance, believers turn away from the old life in Adam, characterized by sin and alienation, and fully embrace the new life in Christ, marked by righteousness and reconciliation. This transition is the gateway into the life of the church, where individuals become new creations, formed not by the standards of the world, but by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

The church also serves as a foretaste of the restored creation, where God's perfect will is fully realized. While humanity still lives in a fallen world, the church is called to reflect the coming reality of God's kingdom. It is a community that not only preaches forgiveness and grace but also practices it in everyday relationships. Members are called to bear one another's burdens, forgive as they have been forgiven, and embody the love of Christ. The church is, therefore, a witness to the world of what redeemed community looks like – a place where the broken are healed, the alienated are welcomed, and the lost are found. As such, the church stands in stark contrast to the fragmented, self-centered communities of the world, offering instead a model of reconciliation, hope, and unity through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the church's mission extends beyond its internal fellowship. It is called to carry the message of salvation to the ends of the earth, inviting all to repent, and enter this new community. The church is not stationary, but missionary, constantly moving outward to reach those still trapped in the community of Adam. As ambassadors of Christ, believers are tasked with proclaiming the good news that in Christ, God has reconciled the world to Himself, and through repentance, anyone can enter this new, Spirit-filled community. Thus, the church is not only the place where God's purpose for

humanity is realized, but also the agent through which God's redemptive plan is made known to the world.

There are other implications of the central theme: the church is Christ and Christ is the church. Christ in the church is related to the word through which the Spirit speaks. Christ is in the word and the word is directed to a "plurality of hearers." The Spirit is active in three sociological relationships: the individual spirit of man, the spiritual community, and spiritual oneness. The Spirit makes a claim on the individual in his loneliness, to bring him to Christ. In trusting Christ, men are made members of the divine community. Being a new creation, they come to know the meaning of agape. Love seeing a response means communion with God and man. Loving communion also means self-surrender to the "Thou" before man – either God or man.¹⁷

Apart from his family – who provided as much intellectual and social stimulation as anyone might have required – he did not seem to have close friends until later in his life. Consequently, during these three years in Berlin, he was something of a loner. At the end of this period and through most of his twenties, there was a woman in his life.¹⁸ She has been rarely mentioned in biographies, and in most cases her name is anonymous. They spent much time together and, by all accounts, were in love and perhaps had even been engaged. The relationship began in 1927 when he was twenty-one, and she, twenty. Like him, she was a theological student at Berlin University. She was a distant cousin and was said to resemble his twin sister Sabine. Her name was Elizabeth Zinn.¹⁹

¹⁷ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 34.

¹⁸ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 65.

¹⁹ Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 66.

Bonhoeffer's favorite quote came because of Elizabeth's doctoral thesis, "Embodiment is the end of God's path."²⁰ When his post-doctoral thesis was published in 1930, he inscribed a copy to her, and when her dissertation was published in 1932, she inscribed a copy to him. During his pastorate in London from late 1933 until early 1935, he sent all his sermons to her, which is how they have been preserved.²¹ After his formal theological training at the university, he went to Barcelona, Spain, where he served in a position comparable to an assistant minister on an intern basis with a German speaking congregation. His ability to relate to people of diverse conditions became apparent here in this congregation of small businessmen whose religious and cultural advancements had been small. The church previously had been on spiritual life support due a decline in ministry and membership, but as he worked with the sage senior pastor of that local congregation, the church was resurrected in spirit and doubled in size. He started a service for children and a study group for boys in the sixth form (the last year) of their education. He gave pastoral care to the people and preached every two weeks. He became attached to the people, and they returned their affection.²² His sermons challenged the congregation both spiritually and intellectually.

In his first sermon he leaped into his favorite subject, the difference between a faith based on our own moral efforts and one based on God's grace. Along the line he mentioned Plato, Hegel, and Kant and quoted Augustine.²³ His eloquence was so mesmerizing until the congregants were puzzled that an earnest twenty-two-year-old

²⁰ Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 66.

²¹ Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 66.

²² Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 15.

²³ Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 77.

could be an undeniable voice of vigor and vitality of keeping everyone's attention during the preaching moment. The gravitational pull Bonhoeffer had on this church provoked the senior pastor to stop announcing the preaching schedule due to the spirit the young seminarian had provided.

He was asked to remain in Barcelona for a year yet his desire to complete his postdoctoral degree, or Habilitation came at the right moment since he did not want to close off the possibility of a future in academia and bide his time to become of age for ordination since he was only twenty-three and needed to be twenty-five to be ordained. Bonhoeffer returned to Berlin University to become a lecturer. Upon his return to Berlin in 1929 he worked on his inaugural dissertation, a requisite for being permitted a faculty position in theology. In 1930, after completing *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, he was given a position teaching systematic theology.

Prior to getting into the serious work of teaching, Bonhoeffer came to America for a year of study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. It was in New York that he noticed how students were less interested in real theology than in the practical element in Christianity. Their lack of interest in serious theology was partially expressed in their smirk facial expressions and laughter when a passage from Martin Luther was quoted on sin and forgiveness. Bonhoeffer had concluded that theology did not even exist at Union. Yet Bonhoeffer noted the students' concern for the poor and needy, and he engaged in their attempts to help relieve some of these problems.²⁴

²⁴ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 16.

While touring the city with fellow students at Union, he befriended a young black man from Alabama named Albert Franklin Fisher who was doing his social work assignment at the historical Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. He had previously worshipped at Riverside, but soon got weary of the sermons delivered there. Fisher invited him to a service in the downtrodden African American community; and it was there Bonhoeffer experienced the preaching of Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. who combined preaching with a sense of fiery revival in addition to great intellect and social vision. During this time, Abyssinian boasted fourteen thousand members and was arguably a “mega church” by these standards being the largest Protestant church of any kind in the whole United States. This staggered him with enthusiasm as he saw the gospel preached and lived out in obedience to God’s commands. He attended every Sunday to worship and to teach a Sunday School class of boys. He was active in several groups in the church, and he gained the trust of many members and was invited to their homes.²⁵

When Bonhoeffer entered Harlem with Fisher, he met a counternarrative to the white racist fiction of black sub-humanity.²⁶ Bonhoeffer immersed himself in Harlem and saw white America from the perspective of black “American outcasts.” He observed white American Christians from the “rather hidden perspective” of American outcasts in Harlem, where he witnessed a white American accommodation of religion and domination in the form of a white Christ. However, with African Americans in Harlem, he did not find Christianity striving to accommodate itself to white supremacist civilized society, nor did he find the liberal Christian expression of the Berlin school of theology

²⁵ Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 108.

²⁶ Reggie L. Williams, *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 23.

that trained him in Germany. In Harlem, Bonhoeffer finally heard something different. He encountered a black Christ as the subject of worship in a Christian dialogue about sin, grace, the love of God, and ultimate hope in a different form to which he was accustomed.²⁷

To many African American Christians, pastors in Harlem, and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance movement, the white Christ was a problem. He represented a type of Christianity that served only to instigate black suffering. The God represented by the white Christ could be described as sadistic; he was a transcendent educator who stood at a distance, coming near only to chastise the sinner with misery. In that case, the popularly derogatory images of idle, lawless, immoral black people made suffering a natural, inevitable, even theologically appropriate part of black life; but that Christ was not worshiped in Harlem. Bonhoeffer found that black Christians identified black suffering with Jesus' suffering.²⁸

Unimpressed with American theology, he was ready to return home to Germany in 1931 to begin his period of lecturing at the University of Berlin. His return home was monumental as he met Karl Barth as the two theologians, though different gained mutual respect.²⁹ *The Cost of Discipleship* was his most famous work, achieving a wide reputation for him. It is a work of "hard sayings." It contains a profound interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount plus an exposition of St. Matthew 9:35 – 10:42, and sections on the "Church of Jesus Christ" and the "Life of Discipleship."³⁰ The elections in Germany

²⁷ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 24.

²⁸ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 25.

²⁹ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 17.

³⁰ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 75.

in 1932 brought about the Nazi rise to power, and the stage was set for the German church struggle.³¹

From the first, he set his face against tyranny in Germany. He was among the first to raise his voice against the monstrous persecution of the Jews when they were forbidden to hold public office or to enter or remain in the ministry of the church. The frustrating opposition to the political church in Germany, the intrigue and plotting designed to rid Germany of a demonic rule make him a fascinating person.³² He knew that the evil of Hitler would one day meet its end and there must be people willing to pick up the pieces when that time came. His look toward the future only expressed his continuing faith in God who was incarnated in Jesus Christ and the church.³³

Bonhoeffer was a different person when he returned from America. He was interested in international relations as well as the downtrodden in the slums of Berlin. At twenty-five he began to live life fully committed to the teachings of Christ. He attended church services regularly, meditated daily on Bible passages, and included prayer and confession as a daily part of his life. He frequently cited the Sermon on the Mount as a basis for Christian action. His friends and associates noticed his new outlook. Bonhoeffer appeared happy with his commitment to the life of the church.

Until this time his desire had been to be a theologian in a scholarly manner. But now, as Bonhoeffer observed, “the theologian became a Christian.” Henceforth he was to be one of the most outstanding church theologians of the twentieth century.³⁴ Although

³¹ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 18.

³² Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 124.

³³ Roark, *Makers of the Modern Theological Minds*, 130.

³⁴ Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King*, 21.

Bonhoeffer's scholarship was united with discipleship this did not come without opposition. There were many Christians in his native Germany who opposed his concern for socially marginalized people. Although the pro-Nazi Christians of the German Christian movement and his colleagues in the Confessing Church movement understood themselves to be faithful Christians, Bonhoeffer identified lethal problems within their Christianity. Like American pro-segregation Christians, the pro-Nazi German Christians demonstrated in a negative way that the mere claim to be a Christian is not an indication of faithful discipleship; what matters is one's interpretation of Christlikeness, how one interprets the way of Jesus. Bonhoeffer had formative experiences in New York in a key historical moment that inspired his efforts in Germany to uncouple the false connection between white imperialist identity and Jesus and its tragic imprint for Christianity. That struggle remained with Bonhoeffer the rest of his life.³⁵

Bonhoeffer aligned himself with the evangelical opposition to Adolf Hitler which ultimately cost him his life on April 9, 1945, at Flossenbürg concentration camp two weeks before the U.S. Army liberated it. Flossenbürg was the last of four prisons that retained him during his two years of incarceration as an enemy of the state. Today, there are some who view him as a controversial figure. As a young pastor devoted to the Sermon on the Mount and to pacifism, he is believed to have been a member of a resistance movement against Hitler.³⁶

Puzzling paradoxes form a part of Bonhoeffer's legacy. He likely participated in a coup attempt against Hitler; radical and perplexing to his colleagues, he gave up a bright

³⁵ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 3.

³⁶ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 137.

future in the academy to struggle for the witness of the church against corrupting Nazi racism; as a blue-eyed, blond, wealthy, educated, prototypical Aryan German man, he chose solidarity with racial outcasts in America and Germany rather than a life of comfort within a society structured specifically to secure him privileges. His decisions to follow his convictions cost him his life. Family and friends had difficulty understanding what was driving Bonhoeffer's ostensibly insane behavior, but he was compelled into these seeming contradictions by his pursuit of meaningful Christian discipleship in a trying time by the call that Harlem's black Christ placed upon his emerging Christian identity as a young religion scholar. He chose to rely on the grace of God in active solidarity with suffering outcasts.³⁷

Many decades after his murder, Bonhoeffer's voice remains relevant and influential. Considering the struggle, he endured to be taken seriously by colleagues within the Confessing Church movement, his work – rather than that of many of his contemporaries – has been most influential and remains relevant in the theological academy and the church today. Bonhoeffer leaves behind a witness of opposition to Christianity regulated by an understanding of the Bible as attainable high ideals.³⁸ Ideals such as the acts of love for mankind in community with Christ; self-renunciation, to work for others by giving up personal claims to happiness; intercessory prayer; and the mutual granting of forgiveness of sins in God's name.

Bonhoeffer's comments on intercessory prayer follow the inspiration of Luther and need serious reconsideration in modern times. More controversial is the matter of mutual

³⁷ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 138.

³⁸ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 138.

granting of forgiveness. This leads most naturally to Bonhoeffer's proposal that a Protestant confession be reinstated, but only if proper instruction is given concerning its meaning.

"Bonhoeffer's treatment of spiritual oneness anticipates a theology for the ecumenical movement. Spiritual unity is willed by God and is not the result of a concord or agreement between men. Unity is misunderstood... Oneness and unity are different. Oneness suggests conformity; unity exhibits the possibility of diversity in the Spirit. This unity is invisible, but it must be believed."³⁹ Bonhoeffer affirms that "unity of the Christian church is not based on human unanimity of spirit, but on divine unity of Spirit, and the two are not identical from the outset."⁴⁰ "The first may never be achieved, but the second is real. Spiritual unity is related to equality. There is equality before God, but neither in the church nor in any community are men identical."⁴¹ In agreeing with Roark, if the church or community had persons that were identical, where would the effort of uniting together originate from? Regardless of any commonality between people, nothing can be achieved unless they are unified in the same Spirit as true believers.

Roark's statement on Bonhoeffer's idea of the ecumenical movement, and the misunderstanding of oneness and unity is also something to be agreed upon. Perhaps the idea of "oneness" is only shown when various local churches come together intermittently for events within their community; only to show a display of unity which

³⁹ Roark, *Bonhoeffer*, 34-35.

⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 198.

⁴¹ Roark, *Bonhoeffer*, 35.

dissolves after the events are concluded and people go their separate ways. True unity is displayed when there is an awareness of diversity, but an appreciation for unity.

Summary

According to Williams, Bonhoeffer remains the only prominent white theologian of the twentieth century to speak about racism as a Christian problem. This claim is debatable as I believe there are many other white theologians who spoke out against racism. As a white man, Bonhoeffer had access to multiple audiences in opposition to racial discrimination that were not available to people of color, and he appropriated what he learned in Harlem for that purpose. His depiction of Jesus represented God for the despised and the rejected of all humanity. In America, Bonhoeffer found that the despised and rejected were black people.

The objective of researching Bonhoeffer was not to explore his humble beginnings. Rather it was to share his experience on what the word of God says relative to unity. This experience was evidence in his time at Abyssinian Baptist Church of New York City. It was during his time at Abyssinian that he was faced with the staunch reality on who Jesus is and what He embraced. Bonhoeffer's desire was to imitate Jesus, and to engage within the world He created to bring all to Him that they might believe. His preliminary visit to America did not afford him the opportunity to get what he was searching for until he arrived at Abyssinian.

There is a disease in the local church, and the cure can only be met with knowing the cause of Christ, and His unlimited love for humanity. However, engagement and fellowship cannot be based on color, biased in culture, and barricaded through cliques.

Color and culture were the major concerns raised during the meeting held in 2010 with Texas Baptists field representatives. Bethlehem was informed shortly after my arrival in 2002 that our demographics in Beeville would change and would ultimately change the make-up of our church if we are doing what Christ mandated us to do. For Bonhoeffer, Christians must see society from the perspective of marginalized people since faithful Christianity is calibrated from the perspective of suffering rather than from dominance. This is costly yet crucial to true Christian discipleship.

Bonhoeffer's legacy leaves an example of true discipleship. His influence grows and people will still find inspiration in his germinal thinking. It led to his twentieth-century martyrdom, but it serves as inspiration for all who desire to unite with Christ in a world where justice rolls down like the waters.⁴²

⁴² Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 140.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Theology of love is a branch of Christian theology that focuses on the nature of love and its role in the Christian faith. Love is a central theme in Christianity, and the theology of love explores the relationship between God's love for humanity and the love that Christians are called to show to others. The hypothesis is if the local church participates in a systematic Bible study and have fellowship the members will have a better understanding of what it means to be a unified body of Christ. The research topic will focus on the leadership and membership of the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church in Beeville, Texas, and its legitimate attempt to know one another internally. From a biblical perspective, the research topic magnifies the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter four, because of God's great plan of salvation and the believers' new identity in Christ, Paul begins a series of admonitions for the readers. He appeals to them to maintain the unity that already exists in the one body God has created. This unity is an essential and natural by-product of the common faith they confess, but it must also be maintained through developing the social virtues associated with selfless love.¹ Historically, Dietrich Bonhoeffer expresses the same sentiments as a student at Union

¹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 227.

Theological Seminary when he met Albert Franklin Fisher. Bonhoeffer had previously visited the Riverside Church when Fisher invited him to the Abyssinian Baptist Church led by Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. It was at Abyssinian that Bonhoeffer experienced the gospel preached and lived out in obedience to God's commands.² At the heart of the theology of love is the belief that God is love, and that all love comes from God.

The mind of Paul and Bonhoeffer are entangled as they both share testimonies of the love of God has for humanity, and how His love should be expressed toward others. John speaks of this in 1 John 4:7-12,

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Christians believe that God's love is unconditional and that it is available to all people, regardless of their circumstances. This love is demonstrated most clearly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the embodiment of God's love for humanity. The theology of love also emphasizes the importance of loving one's neighbor, which is a central teaching of Jesus. Christians are called to love their neighbors as themselves, and to show compassion and kindness to all people, regardless of their race, religion, or social status. This love is not just a feeling, but is expressed through concrete actions, such as caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and advocating for justice and equality.

² Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, 108.

Theology of love also recognizes the importance of self-love, which is not to be confused with selfishness or narcissism. Christians believe that caring for oneself is essential to be able to care for others and is an expression of God's love for us. Overall, the theology of love emphasizes the transformative power of love in the Christian faith and encourages believers to embody this love in their relationships with God, their neighbors, and themselves.

Love is a central theme in Christian theology, and it is often described as the greatest of all virtues. It is a concept that is both simple and complex, with myriad of meanings and interpretations. This chapter will explore the theology of love, examining its roots in the scriptures and its development throughout Christian history. We will also consider the practical implications of the theology of love for the church and for individual believers.

Love in the Old Testament

First, the concept of love is present throughout the Old Testament, and it is often tied to the idea of covenantal relationships between God and His people. I believe there can never be a discussion about God until one identifies with God. Inherent characteristics of God revealed in scripture and displayed in God's actions in biblical history. They are characteristics equally of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God's attributes are revealed in progressively richer and fuller ways within the history of redemption.

According to the Bible, the entire creation shows God's glory, deity (Godhead), and eternal power (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:20). God's providence also reveals certain of his

attributes (Mt. 5:45; Lk. 6:35; Acts 14:16, 17; 17:22–31). The fullest revelation of God’s attributes is seen in his work of redemption through Jesus Christ.

How does scripture express the characteristics of God? First, in the divine names by which God revealed himself (Gn. 1:1; 2:4; 17:1; Ex. 3:6, 14, 15; 6:2–5). Some of God’s attributes are revealed implicitly in the biblical accounts of creation, fall, flood, Babel, and the exodus, and more fully in the various covenants God made with his people. To Israel, he identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:15). To the pharaoh, he identified himself as the “God of Israel” or the “God of the Hebrews” (5:1, 3).

By the time the people of Israel had reached Mt. Sinai the revelation of God’s attributes in the biblical narrative had become more explicit: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6, 7). This summary is repeated elsewhere with slight variations (Nm. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8; Jer. 32:18; Jon. 4:2).

Historically, theologians have often discussed the attributes of God in abstract, speculative, scholastic ways, that never happens in the Bible. God’s disclosure of his attributes led Moses to fall on his knees in worship to confess Israel’s sin and pray for pardon (Ex. 34:8, 9). In other summary passages the response was similar. A sinful appeal to God’s attributes was made by Jonah in his angry prayer (Jon. 4:1–4). To

Christian believers, scripture presents God's attributes as a standard for living: his people are to be holy, loving, and the like, because God is (Lv. 19:2; 1 Jn 4:8, 11).³

In his book, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Daniel Migliore says, "God is self-expending, other-affirming, community-building love. The exchange of love that constitutes the eternal life of God is expressed outwardly in the history of costly love that liberates and reconciles."⁴ He also refers to Karl Barth who states God "loves in freedom," both eternally and in relation to the world, can be worshiped and served as the ultimate power in full confidence and total trust.⁵

Some often think love is an expression which is a sprout that grows from their own soul and is watered with humanistic resources. This misnomer of love would lead people into a fallibility which leaves God out of the equation since He is the author of love. God is omnipotent in the sense that the sovereign love of God has no equal.⁶ In the Old Testament, there is found a special covenant-love (Heb. chesed or hesed) that God has for His people. This most often represented in the KJV by "kindness" (Neh. 9:17; Isa. 54:8, 10), "lovingkindness" (Ps. 69:16; 92:2; Jer. 9:24), and "mercy" (Ps. 100:5; 103:8, 11, 17). This love emphasizes God's faithfulness toward His covenant people. It is a steadfast love, committed to His fulfilling of His gracious covenants.⁷ The connotation of

³ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "God, Being and Attributes Of," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 876.

⁴ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 63.

⁵ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 63.

⁶ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 73.

⁷ Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992), 63.

this significant word is clear in Hosea 2:19, 20: “I will betroth you forever … in righteousness … justice … steadfast love … faithfulness”; in Job 6:14, 15, where kindness is compared with treachery; and in 1 Samuel 20:8, which speaks of covenanted kindness. This unshakable, steadfast love of God is contrasted with the unpredictable, capricious moods of heathen deities. *Hesed* is not an emotional response to beauty, merit, or kindness, but a moral attitude dedicated to another’s good, whether that other is lovable, worthy, or responsive (Dt. 7:7–9).

This enduring loyalty, rooted in an unwavering purpose of good, could be stern, determined to discipline a wayward people, as several prophets warned. God’s love does not change. Through exile and failure, it persisted with infinite patience, neither condoning evil nor abandoning the evildoers. God’s love consists of kindness, tenderness, and compassion (Ps. 86:15; 103:1–18; 136; Hos. 11:1–4), but its chief characteristic is an accepted moral obligation for another’s welfare, which no ill-desert or want of gratitude will quench.

Nevertheless, response was expected. The law enjoined wholehearted love and gratitude for God’s choosing and redeeming Israel (Dt. 6:20–25). This was to be shown in worship, and especially in humane treatment of the poor, the defenseless, the resident alien, slaves, widows, and all suffering oppression and cruelty. Hosea similarly expects steadfast love among men to result from the steadfast love of God toward men (6:6; 7:1–7; 10:12, 13).⁸ However, I believe there is difficulty in steadfast love being exhibited by mankind who do not understand the difference between God’s love and human love.

⁸ R. E. O. White, “Love,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1357.

Veli-Matti Karkkainen makes a reference to my conviction in his article discussing “Martin Luther’s Theology of Love.” Human love is always basically selfish, and it fools men and women to see God with good works and human wisdom. This perverted love in the final analysis renders men and women incapable of receiving God’s grace.

Human love is oriented towards objects which are inherently good, where self-love defines the content and the object of the love. Men and women love something that they believe they can enjoy. For Luther, love as defined by medieval scholastic theology provided an example of this kind of love. God loves in a way opposite to human love. Luther goes on to say, “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it.... Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good.”⁹ Erich Fromm also refers to Luther in his book, *The Art of Loving*, when talks about nothing man does can procure God’s love. God’s love is grace, the religious attitude is to have faith in this grace, and to make oneself small and helpless; no good works can influence God or make God love us.¹⁰

Psalm 136 also provides the concept of a covenantal relationship between God and His people because of ‘hesed.’ This Psalm is an antiphonal Psalm detailing the steadfast love of God with the various actions of God’s redemption throughout history. A brief observation of reading Psalm 136 gives notice to the uniqueness where every attribute of God or demonstration of power is followed by the refrain: “for his steadfast love endures forever” (ESV) or “for His lovingkindness is everlasting” (Ps. 136:3,

⁹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “The Christian As Christ to the Neighbour: On Luther’s Theology of Love,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 2 (2004): 104, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2400.2004.00123.x.

¹⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 1956), 105.

NASB). In these twenty-six verses, the Psalmist is using repetition to stress the covenant love of God. There is a temptation to bypass the refrains, thinking they have been read before. However, this is to miss the force of God's love if the reader replaces "his steadfast love endures forever" with a mental "ditto." Indeed, this repeated explanation for God's action reveals much about God's love and works powerfully to impress His love on our hearts.

As *hesed* is a word that reflects the covenant nature of love and denotes God's faithfulness to His people; Psalm 136 not only reveals praises for God's love but how His love leads Him to act in covenant faithfulness for the people He has created and redeemed. Considering the Old Testament story which Psalm 136 develops there are four covenants mentioned. First, there is the covenant with creation in verses four through nine as God's work in creation and God's covenant love are conjoined. From the repeated combination of *hesed* and the acts of creation, there is a demonstration of God's love. Second, there is the covenant with Abraham in verses ten through sixteen. It is in these verses Israel's defeat of Egypt is describing God's covenant with Israel formed at Sinai, this would be anachronistic. As Exodus 6:2-6 informs us, God is saving Israel from Egypt specifically because of His previous covenant with Abraham. Thus, it seems best to read Psalm 136:10-16 as reflecting the outworking of God's covenant with Abraham, which included a commitment to lead His people out of Egypt (Gen.15:13-14). In this way, the entire Exodus narrative from the call of Moses to the ten plagues, to the Red Sea crossing as an act of God's covenant faithfulness. His love is proved by the way He keeps His word. In this case, it is proved by saving His people from Egypt. Third, there is the covenant with Israel in verses seventeen through twenty-two. This is a shift from the

exodus from Egypt to Yahweh's ongoing role as Israel's shepherd-king. In these verses, the Psalmist remembers God's powerful defeat of mighty kings (vv. 17-18), specifically Sihon and Og, whose demise is told in Numbers 21:21-35. These events occurred after the covenant at Sinai, allows the reader to see verses seventeen through twenty-two as focusing on God's covenant with Israel.

However, this may not be the best way to label this covenant. As Exodus six informs God is saving Israel because of His covenant with Abraham. Thus, the covenant with Israel is not so much a new covenant, as it is a marriage ceremony with His chosen people that includes stipulations and sacrifices for how God's people will live with Him. In this way, the covenant with Israel is an extension or legislative continuation of His covenant with Abraham. In fact, the land mentioned in verses twenty-one through twenty-two are the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, not Moses. Rather, the Law of Moses explains how Abraham's offspring can remain in the land. These events took place after the covenant with Israel (and before God's covenant with David), it seems best to read them as related to the covenant with Israel. Finally, there is the new Davidic covenant. In verses twenty-three through twenty-six there is another shift in focus from Israel's historic past to its historic present. The predominant pronoun used in these verses and set in Book five of the Psalms is, "us." This is a suggestion how this reflects the people of Israel who sit on the other side of the exile.

In a canonical reading of the Psalter, Books one through two follow the rise of David's kingdom. Book three recounts the fall of David's throne. Book four speaks of Israel's exile, and Book five details God's plan of redemption through a new David. Psalm 136 comes after the introduction of this Savior (Ps. 110 and 118), and the return to

Zion in the Songs of Ascent (Ps. 120 – 134), it seems best to read the “us” as those exiles who have returned to Zion and are giving praise to God for his covenant faithfulness.

Importantly, the covenantal cast of these words is seen in the word “remember” (v. 23). In both Genesis 8:1 and Exodus 6:6, God says He remembered the people with whom He made covenant promises. The same thing is true in Psalm 106:45, which reads, “For their sake He remembered His covenant, and relented according to the abundance of His steadfast love.” In all these settings, the idea of “remembering” is “remembering” of God’s covenant.”

In Psalm 136, God has remembered His covenant. Only the language in verse twenty-five expands from Israel to “all flesh.” This is significant, because it matches the increasing scope of God’s new covenant. Just as God promised David that He would possesses the nations (Ps. 89), the new covenant promises a son of David that all nations will stream to Him (cf. Isaiah 2:1 – 5; 60:1-22). Book five is the place in the Psalter where the new covenant is most evident, and thus it makes sense in this context that the praise of God’s remembrance is not just for a past covenant but rather a future one.¹¹

Secondly, in addition to covenantal love, the Old Testament also speaks of brotherly love and love for God. Deuteronomy 6:4 embodies the great principles of covenant relationship that outline the nature and character of God and spell out Israel’s responsibilities to Him.¹² Leviticus 19:18 commands God’s people to “love your neighbor as yourself,” emphasizing the importance of treating others with kindness and

¹¹ David Schrock, “Grasping the Covenantal Love of Psalm 136,” David Schrock, <https://davidschrock.com/2017/12/22/grasping-the-covenantal-love-of-psalm-136/>.

¹² Eugene H. Merrill, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 162.

respect. Love for God, and for “your neighbor as yourself” (Lv. 19:18) are thus linked in Israel’s law and prophecy. While much love of another kind lies within the Old Testament, these are the major points: God’s loving initiative, the moral quality of love, and the close relation of love for God with love among men.¹³ Fromm calls brotherly love the most fundamental kind of love which underlies all types of love. Brotherly love is love for all human beings; it is characterized by its very lack of exclusiveness. If a person has developed the capacity for love, then they cannot help but to love everyone. In brotherly love, there is the experience of union with all men, human solidarity, and human atonement. Brotherly love is based on the experience that we all are one.

Brotherly love is love between equals as all are human. This is not to suggest all are helpless but will one day experience the need of help. Fromm’s statement concerning this would cause me to understand what is known as the “Golden Rule” or treat others the way you would want to be treated. Loving only, one’s flesh and blood does not constitute brotherly love. Significantly, in the Old Testament, the central object of man’s love is the poor, stranger, widow, orphan, and eventually the national enemy. By having compassion for the helpless one, man begins to develop love for his brother; and in his love for himself he also loves the one who needs help, the frail, insecure human being.

Compassion implies the element of knowledge and of identification.¹⁴ As the scripture implies in Exodus 22:21 (ESV) “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”

¹³ White, “Love,” 1357.

¹⁴ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 78-80.

Finally, the Old Testament provides numerous examples of love in action.

Abraham's love for God is demonstrated when he is willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command. Ruth's love for her mother-in-law, Naomi, is shown through her loyalty and devotion as she chooses to leave her own family and homeland to care for Naomi. David's love for his friend Jonathan is a touching example of brotherly love as he grieves deeply at Jonathan's death and declares, "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:26).

Love in the New Testament

The New Testament builds upon the Old Testament's teachings on love, but it also introduces some new ideas and concepts. Jesus is often seen as the embodiment of divine love, and His teachings on love are central to His message. In the Gospel of John, Jesus commands His disciples to "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12), and He explains that by this love, others will know that they are His disciples (Jn. 13:35). Preston Taylor refers to the latter in his book, *The Eleven Commandments* by saying how God's love has been expressed in countless ways down through the centuries. He gave the Hebrews the Ten Commandments as an expression of His love. However, that nation's leaders became so fascinated and entangled in a legal system that they overlooked the command to love. God said they were to love Him and one another, but they failed because they fell into a legal trap. Jesus came in order that mankind might see the love of God in a new way.¹⁵

¹⁵ Preston A. Taylor, *The Eleven Commandments* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2007), 105.

The New Testament also introduces several types of love that were not as prominent in the Old Testament. Christianity inherited this strongly moral connotation of love, not always remembered by those who sentimentalize the love ethic, *Agapē*. Of Greek words available, *eros* (sexual love) does not occur in the New Testament; *phileō*, spontaneous natural affection, with more feeling than reason, occurs some twenty-five times, with *philadelphia* (brotherly love) five times, and *philia* (friendship) only in James 4:4; *storge*, natural affection between kinfolk, appears occasionally in compounds. By far the most frequent word is *agapē*, generally assumed to mean moral goodwill which proceeds from esteem, principle, or duty, rather than attraction or charm. *Agapē* means to love the undeserving, despite disappointment and rejection; the difference between *agapaō* and *phileō* is difficult to sustain in all passages. *Agapē* is especially appropriate for religious love. *Agapē* was long believed to be a Christian coinage, but pagan occurrences have recently been claimed. The verb *agapaō* was frequent in the Greek Old Testament. Though *agapē* has more to do with moral principle than with inclination or liking, it never means the cold religious kindness shown from duty alone, as scriptural examples abundantly prove.¹⁶

To get a better understanding of how *agapē* and *phileō*, is distinguished the biblical passage of Lazarus' death in John chapter eleven can be implied. Bethany was the place Jesus encountered two sisters: Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Luke's gospel implies in chapter 10:38-42 Jesus shares a meal with them and leaves a valuable lesson with Martha how worshipping the Master is better than worrying about the meal

¹⁶ R. E. O. White, "Love," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1357.

being served. Lazarus becomes gravely ill, and his sisters send word to Jesus in verse three, “Lord, behold, he whom You love (*phileō*) is sick.” Verse five states that Jesus loved (*agapē*) Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus delayed his going to see about His friend Lazarus for two days and showed up in Bethany after he had been deceased for four days. Ralph Earle says, “The highest motivation for love is not our feelings or affections, but rather an honest, intelligent facing of the question: ‘What is best for the one I love?’”¹⁷ That is how God acts when His love is shown.

Agapē and *phileō* can also be used in the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is one the few examples of love exhibited in the New Testament and will be used in this presentation. Howard Thurman uses this illustration in his book, *Jesus and the Disinherited* speaking on the wise of the religion of Jesus making the ethic of love central. Thurman also states how this way to love is no ordinary achievement. When “loving our neighbor as thyself” is defined then the moral obligation is clear. True love responds directly to human need across the barriers of class, race, and condition. Everyone is potentially everyone’s neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. One must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between.

Loving those in your own community is not an easy position to take. Jesus encountered this obstacle when opposition to His teachings increased, and a twofold demand was always placed upon Him: to love those of the household of Israel who became His enemies because they regarded Him as a careless perverter of the truths of God; to love those beyond the household of Israel, the Samaritan, and even the Roman.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2005), 89.

¹⁸ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 79-80.

Love is often doing things because it is the right thing to do. Love for one's neighbor is nowhere defined but everywhere illustrated. In the parable of the good Samaritan, "neighbor" is shown to mean anyone near enough to help, and love involves whatever service the neighbor's situation demands. The parable of the sheep and goats shows love feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting with kindness the sick and the imprisoned. In the untiring example of Jesus love heals, teaches, adapts instruction to the hearers by parable and symbolic language, defends those criticized or despised, pronounces forgiveness, comforts the bereaved, and befriends the lonely. We are to love others as he has loved us and as we love ourselves, which means "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (Mt. 7:12). Such imaginative transfer of self-love does good without expecting a return, never returns ill-treatment, ensures unfailing courtesy even to the lowliest, sustains thoughtful understanding that tempers judgment.¹⁹

When Jesus gives the two love commands, what strikes one immediately is that Jesus says nothing at all about reasons or motives for loving the neighbor; all He says is that one should love one's neighbor as oneself. He nowhere rejects caring about some people because one is attached to them, caring about others because one feels compassion for them, caring about yet others because one finds oneself attracted to them, and so forth. In all such cases one is doing what Jesus commanded, caring about the other, and seeking to promote good.

All of us find that there are "neighbors" who fall outside the orbit of the care evoked by our natural dynamics of attachment, attraction, compassion, identification, and the like. Our natural dynamics leave us in different to their good. In such cases, our care

¹⁹ White, "Love," 1358.

about them will have to be out of duty. Duty is the fallback position. Jesus does not say what Kierkegaard interprets Him as saying, namely, love your neighbor out of duty. He says simply, love your neighbor. If no natural dynamics motivate you to care about your neighbor, then care about them out of duty. However, it is not your duty to care about every neighbor out of duty.²⁰

In the New Revised Standard Version, Jesus describes the Samaritan in the parable as “moved with pity” when he saw the mugged man beside the road. “Pity” is not the best rendering of the Greek into contemporary English. “Pity” connotes an attitude of superiority on the part of the one who pities. There was no attitude of superiority on the part of the Samaritan. He responded as he did because the plight of the mugged man evoked compassion him. Be it noted that he did not respond as he did because he saw it as his duty to do so.²¹

Secondly, Jesus shows *agapē* and *phileō* love to His disciples. John 13:1 says, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” Love is one of the key terms in John thirteen through seventeen, occurring thirty-one times in these five chapters as compared to only six times in John one through twelve. Jesus now shows His disciples the full extent of His love.²² What is more, this departure is next interpreted by John in the context of the ultimate extent of love (lit., “he loved them unto the end”) evidenced in Jesus’ death for the world (cf. 3:16)

²⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 117.

²¹ Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 116-117.

²² Rodney A. Whitacre, “John,” in *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 327.

and particularly here for those in the world who belong to him.²³ At the beginning of the chapter from which this text is taken, we read that Jesus “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end” (Jn. 13:1). That kind of love did not stop. Jesus had gathered with His disciples the night before His crucifixion. He told them about their heavenly home, and He discussed His death. He also shared with them the memorial meal of the bread and wine that were broken and poured as a symbol of His own death and shedding of His own blood. That love of Jesus did not stop short of the cross. He showed that love to be true and never-ending.²⁴

D. A. Carson further discusses *agapē* and *phileō* when Simon Peter is reinstated by Jesus in John 21:15-17 after his denial before the crucifixion. I agree with Carson when he refutes the noun *agapē* has become the verb *agapaō* which he says cannot be used interchangeably. Jesus’ initial question probes Peter to the depth of his being. He does not try to answer in terms of the relative strength of his love as compared with that of other disciples. He appeals rather to the Lord’s knowledge. Despite my bitter failure, he says in effect, I love you “you know that I love you.”²⁵ While some do not understand the explanation of the various meanings of love, they understand the expression and the messages love exhibits.

Finally, the Apostle Paul also teaches extensively about love in his letters to the early Christian communities. In 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen, Paul describes love as the greatest of all virtues, and he explains that without love, even the most impressive

²³ Gerald L. Borchert, “John 12–21,” in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2002), 77.

²⁴ Taylor, *The Eleven Commandments*, 106.

²⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 677.

spiritual gifts are meaningless. Paul also emphasizes the importance of love in relationships between believers, as he admonishes the church in Ephesus to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3, NKJV).

It is the task of the local church to become intentional about ministry and discipleship. The two must come together and result in love to know Christ, and to make Christ known. Therefore, I believe this work is foundational to my project. If the local believers in a church would participate in knowing how similar or different, we are in life, but all the same with Christ; an impact can be made. How can an introduction of Christ be made to people if the people introducing Him fail to know each other? It is not an approved standard of righteous living that separates a follower of Christ from the unbeliever, but it is Christ who stands between them. Christians always see other men as brethren to whom Christ comes; they meet them only by going to them with Jesus. Disciple and non-disciple can never encounter each other as free men, directly exchanging their views and judging one another by objective criteria. No, the disciple can meet the non-disciple only as a man to whom Jesus comes. Here alone Christ’s fight for the soul of the unbeliever, His call, love, grace and judgement come into its own. Discipleship does not afford us a point of vantage from which to attack others; we come to them with an unconditional offer of fellowship, with the single-mindedness of the love of Jesus.²⁶

²⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1959), 204.

Theology of Love in the Church

The church can practice the theology of love in several ways. In this section, we will explore some of the ways in which the church can practice the theology of love. The basis of the theology of love is the two greatest commandments as stated by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” T. B. Maston says in his book, *Both-And* “The one who loves God supremely and his neighbor as himself will keep or fulfill all the basic moral law, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments.”²⁷ The church can practice the theology of love by encouraging its members to love God completely and others compassionately. This can be achieved through preaching moments, Bible studies, and other forms of teaching. The church can also organize events and activities that promote love for God and love for others, such as volunteer work, mission trips, and community service.

Another way in which the church can practice the theology of love is through forgiveness and reconciliation. The Bible teaches that forgiveness is an important aspect of love, and that we should forgive others as God has forgiven us (Col. 3:13). The church can encourage its members to practice forgiveness and reconciliation by offering pastoral counseling, support groups, and other resources that help individuals to overcome hurt, anger, and resentment. The church can also provide opportunities for individuals to seek forgiveness and to reconcile with others, such as through prayer, confession, and mediation.

²⁷ T.B Maston, *Both-And* (Waco, TX: Word Press, 2011), 77.

The Apostle Paul exhorted repeatedly to those who he wrote to be like Jesus. He appealed to the Corinthians to be imitators of him as he was of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). He admonished the Ephesians to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (Eph. 5:2). The course set forth by Christ for the church to follow is not considered uncharted territory. Jesus never asks His church to walk in a way that He has not already explored. T.W. Manson says, “The living Christ still has two hands, one to point the way, and the other held out to help us along.”²⁸

The church can also practice the theology of love through social justice and compassion. The Bible teaches that we should care for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized (Is.1:27, Pro.31:8-9). Wherever *agapē* is found in human life and relations, God is its source. The deeper needs of individual persons and of the community of persons cannot be met apart from *agapē*. Paul Tillich says, “Love, in the sense of *agapē* contains justice in itself as its unconditional element and as its weapon against its own sentimentalization.” Tillich believed love is the creative element in justice, and the unconditional demand for justice is in the very nature of *agapē*. If love takes justice into itself justice is not diminished but enhanced.²⁹

The church can advocate for social justice and compassion by raising awareness about social issues, supporting charitable organizations, and engaging with local and national governments. The church can also provide practical support to those in need, such as food banks, shelters, and medical clinics.

²⁸ Maston, *Both-And*, 75.

²⁹ Maston, *Both-And*, 195.

Summary

The church can practice the theology of love in several ways. By encouraging its members to love God and love others, by promoting forgiveness and reconciliation, and by advocating for social justice and compassion. The church can demonstrate the love of Christ to the world. The theology of love should be the foundation of all Christians.

The theology of love is rooted in the belief that God is love, and that love is a central characteristic of God's nature. This idea is expressed in 1 John 4:8, which declares, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." Because we are created in God's image, we are called to reflect His love in our own lives. This means that love is not simply a feeling or emotion, but it is a fundamental orientation of the heart that shapes our thoughts, words, and actions.

The theology of love also emphasizes the importance of love as a commandment. Jesus declared that the two greatest commandments are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37 – 39). This means that love is not simply an optional extra for Christians, but it is a fundamental obligation that we must take seriously.

The theology of love emphasizes the importance of love as a means of salvation. The Apostle Paul explains that we are saved by grace through faith, but he also emphasizes that faith without works is dead (Jam. 2:17). This means that our faith must be expressed in tangible acts of love and service to others. As Jesus himself declared, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

The theology of love has numerous practical implications for the life of the church and individual believers. Loving God involves worship, obedience, and prayer. Worship is an expression of our love for God, as we offer Him praise and adoration for who He is and what He has done. Obedience is another way we demonstrate our love for God, as we seek to follow his commands and live according to His will. Prayer is also an important aspect of loving God, as we communicate with Him and seek His guidance and wisdom.

Loving others involves forgiveness, service, and hospitality. Forgiveness is a key aspect of love, as we seek to extend grace and mercy to those who have wronged us. Service is another way we express our love for others, as we seek to meet their needs and care for them in practical ways. Hospitality is also an important aspect of love, as we welcome others into our homes and lives and seek to make them feel valued and appreciated.

Conclusion

The theology of love is a central theme in Christian theology, and it has profound implications for the life of the church and individual believers. Love is not simply an optional extra for Christians, but it is a fundamental obligation that we are called to take seriously. As we seek to love God and love others, we reflect the character of God and fulfill our purpose as His children. May we all strive to live lives that are characterized by love, and may this love transform us and the world around us.

What has been said throughout this chapter can be concluded by stating that for the Christian and the Christian community there can be no retreat from the world. G.

Ernest Wright claims that there is a lot of material in the New Testament dealing with the responsibility of the community of Christ to its Lord before the world than we have an active responsibility for the salvation of the world. He suggests that this is true because salvation is in the hands of God. It is also possible that this is true because the most effective thing children of God can do to bring others to salvation in Christ is to be consistent living witnesses of the grace of God as that grace finds expression in every area of their lives.³⁰

³⁰ Maston, *Both-And*, 47.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Everyone, at some time in life, is asked to be a leader, whether to lead a classroom discussion, coach a children's soccer team, or direct a fund-raising campaign. Many situations require leadership. A leader may have a high profile or a low profile, but in every situation, there are leadership demands placed on the individual who is the leader. Being a leader is challenging, exciting, rewarding, and carries with it many responsibilities.

At the outset, it is important to address a basic question: What is leadership? In his book, *Introduction to Leadership*, Peter Northouse gives an overview of the evolution of leadership approaches. He discusses leadership first being a trait, which is often inherited. Secondly, leadership is a behavior, which is what leaders do when they are in the role of leadership. Third, leadership is relational, hence leadership is centered on communication between leaders and followers rather than on the unique qualities of the leader. Finally, a new leadership approach called transformational leadership which describes leadership as a process that changes people and organizations.¹

¹ Peter G. Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2012), 2.

During the 1960s, Dunn and Bradstreet reported an average of more than thirteen thousand business failures annually.² Natural and professional curiosity led them to search out why. Their analysis revealed that the largest of these casualties were due to managerial deficiencies. The truth of the matter is businesses do not fail until the leaders do. When there is a visit to a restaurant and the place is dilapidated, and unkempt along with the food on the menu being undesirable, as an astute observer, the problem wasn't simply an irresponsible maintenance crew or a preoccupied waiter or an amateur cook; it was management.³

The Dallas Cowboys is one of the National Football League's most successful franchises, and for twenty-nine years they were led by only one coach. During Tom Landry's tenure the Cowboys would be known as, "America's Team" and would dominate the league winning two championships in the 1970s. However, it was during the 1980s they experienced misfortunes of losing which caused instabilities with revenue, and their fan base. Regardless of who they signed as free agents or drafted from college; their misfortunes remained. Things abruptly changed when their current owner Bum Bright sold the team to Jerry Jones who not only became owner; he also became general manager, and president of football operations leading to Tom Landry's dismissal.

When the Chrysler Corporation decided to get serious about solving its decline in the American automobile industry, it did not change the body style on its new cars or ask

² Chuck Swindoll, *Leadership: Influence That Inspires* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 15.

³ Swindoll, *Leadership: Influence That Inspires*, 16.

its dealers across the country to paint their building another color. No, Chrysler hired a new and innovative leader name Lee Iacocca who was a protégé of Henry Ford.⁴

Northouse calls leadership a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Defining leadership as an influence process means that it is not a trait or an ability that resides in the leader, but rather an interactive event that occurs between the leader and the followers. Influence is central to the process of leadership because leaders affect followers. Leaders direct their energies toward influencing individuals to achieve something together. Stressing common goals gives leadership an ethical dimension because it lessens the possibility that leaders might act toward followers in ways that use coercion or are unethical.⁵

Northouse's definition of leadership could further be categorized as leadership this transformational or transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is one of the current and most popular approaches to leadership and has been the focus of much research since the 1980s. As its name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership.⁶

⁴ Swindoll, *Leadership*, 17.

⁵ Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership*, 6.

⁶ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2022), 185.

Albert Mohler says when he was a teenager, he looked for examples of leadership. He read literature on Winston Churchill, but realized Churchill was no mere manager – he was a leader of world-changing courage. Mohler was further influenced by Ronald Reagan in 1976 as he shared his ideas and the possibility the way Washington, D.C. was run. Mohler called Reagan's leadership transformational because he believed what he was saying, and saw Reagan persuaded others to believe with him.⁷

The Characteristics of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is in some ways an expansion of transactional leadership. Transactional leadership emphasizes the transaction or exchange that takes places among leaders, colleagues, and followers. This exchange is based on the leader discussing with others what is required and specifying the conditions and rewards these others will receive if they fulfill those requirements. Transformational leadership, however, raises leadership to the next level. Transformational leadership involves inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers' leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support.⁸

Early social science perspectives on leadership focused on the separation of directive (task-oriented) verses participative (people-oriented) leadership.

⁷ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012), 16-17.

⁸ Bernard E. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 3.

Transformational leadership can be either directive or participative and is not an either-or proposition.

Transformational leadership has much in common with charismatic leadership, but charisma is only part of transformational leadership. A critical concern for theories of both transformational and charismatic leadership involves what many refer to as the dark side of charisma – those charismatic leaders who use their abilities to inspire and lead followers to destructive, selfish, and even evil ends. Most often coming to mind are international leaders who wreaked havoc, death, and destruction on thousands and even millions – Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, Josef Stalin, Osama Bin Laden. However, these leaders are those who can be called pseudo-transformational. They exhibit many elements of transformational leadership; particularly the charismatic element, but have personal, exploitative, and self-aggrandizing motives.⁹

Transformational leaders do more with colleagues and followers than set up simple exchanges or agreements. They behave in ways to achieve superior results by employing one or more of the four core components of transformational leadership. To some extent, the components of transformational leadership have evolved as refinements have been made in both the conceptualization and measurement of transformational leadership. Conceptually, leadership is charismatic, and followers seek to identify with the leader and emulate him or her. The leadership inspires followers with challenge and persuasion, providing both meaning and understanding. The leadership is intellectually stimulating, expanding the followers' use of their abilities. Finally, the leadership is

⁹ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 3.

individually considerate, providing the follower with support, mentoring, and coaching.¹⁰

Northouse states that individuals' intentions to lead in a transformational manner appear related to effective transformational leadership behaviors.¹¹

The first behavior of an effective transformational leader is idealized influence. Transformational leaders behave in ways that allow them to serve as role models for their followers. The leaders are admired, respected, and trusted. Followers identify with the leaders and want to emulate them; leaders are endowed by their followers as having extraordinary capabilities, persistence, and determination.¹²

Idealized influence was attributed to the incident which occurred in August 2010 where thirty-miners from Copiapo, Chile was trapped 2,300 feet underground in a 549-foot safety shelter. In high humidity and a temperature near ninety degrees, individual miners braced themselves against the hurricane-force winds and eye-clogging dust that accompany disastrous cave-ins.

As the brutal blasts of air, falling rock, and dust began to subside, Luis Urzua, the shift foreman, sought to control the panicky men. Among the confusion and chaos of the ordeal, Urzua lost control of the group and Mario Sepulveda, the unofficial jester in the group, began to take leadership, and organize the miners into three separate units. There was a miner in the group who was also a preacher that summoned the men to daily prayer which provided a glimmer of faith and hope of a possible rescue. Urzua and Sepulveda organize a mission to use any available means to communicate to rescuers on the surface

¹⁰ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 3.

¹¹ Northouse, *Leadership*, 191.

¹² Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 4.

that the men were still alive. On the third day of the ordeal, Sepulveda called a group meeting and lectured the group to respect Urzua, but also indicated he would take charge if no one else was willing to. Urzua and Sepulveda used their idealized influence that would lead to the men being rescued.¹³

The idealized influence factor is measured on two components: an attributional component that refers to the attributions of leaders made by followers based on perceptions they have of their leaders, and a behavioral component that refers to followers' observations of leader behavior. In essence, the charisma factor describes people who are special and who make others want to follow the vision they put forward. A person whose leadership exemplifies the charisma factor is Nelson Mandela, the first Black president of South Africa. Mandela is viewed as a leader with high moral standards and a vision for South Africa that resulted in monumental change in how the people of South Africa were governed. His charismatic qualities and the people's response to them transformed an entire nation.¹⁴

The second behavior of an effective transformational leader is inspirational motivation. Transformational leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work. Team spirit is aroused. Enthusiasm and optimism are displayed. Leaders get followers involved in envisioning attractive future states; they create clearly communicated expectations that followers want to meet and also demonstrate commitment to goals and the shared

¹³ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *How Great Leaders Think* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 39-40.

¹⁴ Northouse, *Leadership*, 193.

vision.¹⁵ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, "I Have A Dream" speech is a great example of inspirational motivation. King inspired millions of people to work towards a more just and equal society.

Transformational leaders also encourage their followers to take risks and be creative in pursuit of their goals. They provide support and guidance to help their followers achieve their full potential. Apple CEO Steve Jobs' leadership style was characterized by his ability to inspire and motivate his team to think outside the box and innovate. Peter Drucker says in his book, *The Effective Executive*, "Organizations are not more effective because they have better people. They have better people because they motivate to self-development through their standards, through their habits, and through their climate."¹⁶

The third behavior of an effective transformational leader is intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways. Creativity is encouraged. There is no public criticism of individual members' mistakes. New ideas and creative problem solutions are solicited from followers, who are included in the process of addressing problems and finding solutions. Followers are encouraged to try new approaches, and their ideas are not criticized because they differ from the leaders' ideas.¹⁷ Carol Burbank's term, "Shapeshifter Leadership" could also be referred to as intellectual stimulation. Burbank

¹⁵ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 4.

¹⁶ Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 170.

¹⁷ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 4.

uses the example of Helen Keller's teacher Annie Sullivan who used extreme measures to break patterns that limited Keller's perceptions. Sullivan changed the way Keller lived and learned, from an enraged and caged wild thing to an articulate and learned human being, ultimately giving her the tools to become an influential educator and public intellectual.¹⁸

The fourth behavior of an effective transformational leader is individualized consideration. Transformational leaders pay special attention to each individual follower's needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor. Followers and colleagues are developed to successively higher levels of potential. Individualized consideration is practiced when new learning opportunities are created along with a supportive climate. Individual differences in terms of needs and desires are recognized. The leader's behavior demonstrates acceptance of individual differences (e.g., some employees receive more encouragement, some more autonomy, others firmer standards, and still others more task structure). A two-way exchange in communication is encouraged, and "management by walking around" workspaces is practiced. Interactions with followers are personalized (e.g., the leader remembers previous conversations, is aware of individual concerns, and sees the individual as a whole person rather than as just an employee). The individually considerate leader listens effectively. The leader delegates tasks as a means of developing followers. Delegated tasks are monitored to see

¹⁸ C. S. Pearson, *The Transforming Leader: New Approaches to Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Incorporated, 2012), 116.

if the followers need additional direction or support and to assess progress; ideally, followers do not feel they are being checked on.¹⁹ Karl Kuhnert says:

The only way to help a follower develop is to understand how he or she views the world and then help him or her in confronting experiences that illustrate the limitations of that view. Thus, the ability to fully use delegation as a developmental tool requires that leaders understand that delegation of specific activities is necessary if followers are to advance to the next level of development. Delegation by abdication of responsibility will not develop others.²⁰

The Role of Communication in Transformational Leadership

Mohler calls communication the one central duty that stands out above all others. Leadership does not happen until communication happens. The leader may have the most brilliant strategy in mind, the most breathtaking vision in sight, and an irrepressible passion in their heart, but if these are not communicated to others, real leadership does not occur.

To be human is to communicate, but to be a leader is to communicate constantly, skillfully, intentionally, and strategically. The effective leader communicates so pervasively that it seems second nature, and so intentionally that no strategic opportunity is ever surrendered.²¹

I agree with Mohler further as he speaks on people trying to contrast communication with action, as if the two are at odds. Communication is action, and the leader will spend more time communicating than in any other activity. The best leaders

¹⁹ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 4.

²⁰ Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness Through Transformational Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1994), 23.

²¹ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 91.

know that the road to great effectiveness is paved with intentional communications, and the very best leaders are always learning how to be even more effective as communicators.²²

Words are the priceless currency of communication. The most effective leaders are collectors and connoisseurs of words. They polish and perfect the deployment of specific words for greatest effect. They know that words are powerful when memorable and delivered with conviction. They know that Mark Twain was right when he said that the difference between the almost right word and the right word is “the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”²³

One essential requirement of leadership is the ability to talk, and to talk well. While the leader’s responsibility to talk is most often associated with public speaking, and the actual work of leadership requires the ability to talk in any number of different contexts, and to master written expression as well.²⁴

Newman Enyioko states communication is critical to a leader’s success, and an ineffective leader communication leads to problems in many organizations. Communication is one of the most important leadership skills, and it allows achievement of personal and organizational goals. In fact, internal communication is essential for employee motivation for better performance. Effective and accurate communication act as an important factor to grow as an efficient and successful leader or manager. To achieve professional success leaders must be effective and convincing communicators. It

²² Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 91-92.

²³ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 92.

²⁴ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 92.

is important that leaders and their teams must learn how to communicate perfectly as this not only help teams to complete their projects successfully, but also enable organizations to achieve success and growth.²⁵

If a leader must look for a message, their leadership is doomed. Leaders communicate because they cannot not communicate, and their message flows out of them naturally as a geyser releases its energy.²⁶ Transformational leaders are eager to articulate vision and give direction with the keen knowledge of having kickback from those who will not understand or unwilling to embrace what is presented. Clarity of mission is vital to communicate effectively. Frances Hesselbein and Paul Cohen states in their article, “Leader to Leader” how hard it is to focus on what you cannot define as most organizations have materials printed with mission, and purpose statements, but very few can say how the mission statement transformed the enterprise. There has grown an understandable cynicism about lofty ideals that do not match the realities of organizational life.²⁷

The first obstacle to understanding mission is a problem of language. Many leaders use mission and vision interchangeably or think that the words—and the differences between them—matter little, words matter. Language is messy by nature, which is why we must be careful how we use it. As leaders, after all, we have little else with which to work. We typically do not use hammers and saws, heavy equipment, or

²⁵ Newman Enyioko, “Effect of Leadership Communication on Organizational Behavior,” SSRN Electronic Journal (April 6, 2021): 1, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3820943.

²⁶ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 92.

²⁷ Frances Hesselbein and Paul M. Cohen, *Leader to Leader (LTL), Enduring Insights on Leadership From the Drucker Foundation’s Award-Winning Journal* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 59.

even computers to do our real work. The essence of leadership, what we do with 98% of our time, is communication. To master any management practice, we must start by bringing discipline to the domain in which we spend most of our time, the domain of words.

The dictionary—which unlike the computer is an essential leadership tool—contains multiple definitions of the word mission; the most appropriate here is "purpose, reason for being." Vision, by contrast, is "a picture or image of the future we seek to create," and values articulate how we intend to live as we pursue our mission. Paradoxically, if an organization's mission is truly motivating, it is never really achieved. Mission provides an orientation, not a checklist of accomplishments. It defines a direction, not a destination. It tells the members of an organization why they are working together, how they intend to contribute to the world. Without a sense of mission there is no foundation for establishing why some intended results are more important than others.²⁸

There is a big difference between having a mission statement and being truly mission based. To be truly mission-based means that key decisions can be referred to the mission—our reason for being. It means that people can and should object to management edicts that they do not see as connected to the mission. It means that thinking about and continually clarifying the mission is everybody's job. By contrast, most mission statements are nice ideas that might have some meaning for a few but communicate little to the community. In most organizations, no one would dream of

²⁸ Hesselbein and Cohen, *Leader to Leader*, 59.

challenging a management decision because it does not serve the mission. In other words, most organizations serve those in power rather than a mission.²⁹

Transformational leadership does not give the leader a license to be a tyrant with the “my way or the highway” mentality or even acting to implement the will of the group. Active listening, feedback, and transparency must be implemented within the leadership gameplan. Leaders who become slaves to market forces, opinion polls, focus groups, or the self-interest of their constituents are not truly transformational. For transformation to occur, leaders need to educate, inspire, and motivate groups to have higher aspirations. This means that whether we have positional power, we have the responsibility to use the power we have in the service of a positive vision of the greater good. Finding the right balance between truly listening to others, even those who disagree with us, and fulfilling the hefty responsibility to speak and act courageously to bring about such a vision is a challenge.³⁰ Listening leads to learning, which sets the stage for innovation and productivity.³¹

Feedback according to Marshall Goldsmith is a task many transformational leaders avoid for fear they will be no longer liked. I agree with Goldsmith when he says how leaders are often afraid that confronting people about poor teamwork or other behavioral shortcomings (as opposed to performance problems) will cause them to be disliked. Goldsmith goes on to say that leaders are more respected, not less, if they

²⁹ Hesselbein and Cohen, *Leader to Leader*, 59.

³⁰ Pearson, *The Transforming Leader*, 31.

³¹ Hesselbein and Cohen, *Leader to Leader*, 307.

delivered the bad news. Past surveys have proven that people highly value honest feedback even if the feedback has negative overtones.³²

As one of the most important factors influencing organizational success, trust has been empirically established as a mediator between transformational leadership and employee attitudes, job satisfaction, and team performance. Additionally, trust also results from effective internal communication and in turn affects employee behaviors and overall organizational outcomes. As previously argued, transformational leadership and transparent communication during the change contribute to employees' organizational trust. In turn, when employees trust organizational abilities to implement the change, they are more likely to believe that the change is beneficial and well-intentioned, and therefore demonstrate greater openness to change. In this process, trust serves as a key mediator through which the power of transformational leadership and transparent communication is manifested.³³

The Benefits of Transformational Leadership

According to James Burns, no leader can truly lead if they cannot respond to the wants of followers, if they fail to elevate and empower them. No leader can truly lead if lacking in the ability to produce intended change through creative innovation.³⁴ Mohler shares a contrast of this ideal by calling it the passion to lead. Passion arises naturally or not at all. It happens when convictions come to life, and deep beliefs drive visions and plans. The passionate leader is driven by the knowledge that the right beliefs, aimed at

³² Hesselbein and Cohen, *Leader to Leader*, 350.

³³ C. A. Yue, L. R. Men, and M. A. Ferguson, "Bridging Transformational Leadership, Transparent Communication, and Employee Openness to Change: The Mediating Role of Trust," *Public Relations Review* 45, no. 3 (2019): 87, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.04.012>.

³⁴ J. M. Burns, *Transforming Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Grove/Atlantic, Incorporated, 2004), 31.

the right opportunity, can lead to earth-shaking changes. The leaders who are most transformative and effective are those who believe most deeply in what they are doing, in the theory of their own business. Steve Jobs really believed that people would be empowered by technology. Henry Ford really thought that the cause of humanity would be greatly advanced by the development of the automobile, the living wage, and the assembly line.³⁵

Passion and innovation benefit both the transformational leader and their followers as it can lead to organizational success, innovation, and growth. Northouse identifies four strategies of what I consider the results of passion and innovation. First, there was a clear vision of the future state of the organization. When an organization has a clear vision, it is easier for people within the organization to learn how they fit in with the overall direction of the organization and even the society in general. It empowers them because they feel they are a significant dimension of a worthwhile enterprise. Although leaders play a large role in articulating the vision, the emergence of the vision originates from both the leaders and followers.

Second, transforming leaders were social architects for their organizations. This means they created a shape or form for the shared meanings people maintained within their organizations. These leaders communicated a direction that transformed their organization's values and norms. In many cases, these leaders were able to mobilize people to accept a new group identity or a new philosophy for their organizations.

A good example of a transforming leader with a clear vision and who is a social architect for his organization is college football coach P. J. Fleck. Fleck is the current

³⁵ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 53.

head coach at the University of Minnesota but earned his first head coaching job at Western Michigan University. Fleck created a culture for these programs that emphasized athletes' growth in four areas: academic, athletic, social, and spiritual. He was insistent that players assume leadership roles and consistently model the desired culture of the team. Coach Fleck would often repeat, "Bad teams, nobody leads. Average teams, coaches lead. Elite teams, players lead."³⁶

Third, transforming leaders created trust in their organizations by making their own positions clearly known and then standing by them. Trust has to do with being predictable or reliable, even in situations that are uncertain. In organizations, leaders build trust by articulating a direction and then consistently implementing the direction even though the vision may have involved a high degree of uncertainty.

Fourth, transforming leaders used creative deployment of self through positive self-regard. Leaders knew their strengths and weaknesses, and they emphasized their strengths rather than dwelled on their weaknesses. Based on an awareness of their own competence, effective leaders were able to immerse themselves in their tasks and the overarching goals of their organizations. They were able to fuse a sense of self with the work at hand. Positive self-regard in leaders had a reciprocal impact on followers, creating in them feeling of confidence and high expectations.³⁷ Steve Jobs is a good example of a leader who used creative deployment of self through positive self-regard. When Jobs described the devices, he wanted to create, many people said they were not

³⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 151.

³⁷ Northouse, *Leadership*, 198-199.

possible. Jobs never doubted his products would change the world, and despite resistance, he did things the way he thought best.³⁸

The Challenges of Transformational Leadership

Northouse shares that transformational leadership has several challenges. One challenge is that it lacks conceptual clarity. It covers such a wide range of activities and characteristics – creating a vision, motivating, being a change agent, building trust, giving nurturance, and acting as a social architect, to name a few. It is difficult to define exactly the parameters of transformational leadership. Another challenge of the transformational leadership approach is that it may not be viewed as effective in all national cultures. Despite prior claims that transformational leadership is universal, this is not supported by data. A meta-analysis of more than 57,000 employees in thirty-four countries found that the value of transformational leadership behaviors may be limited in developed economies such as Western Europe and North America, while transformational leadership is most effective in Africa, the Middle East, South America, and parts of Southeast Asia.³⁹

A final potential challenge Northouse conveys is transformational leadership not being well received by millennials. As millennials continue to replace baby boomers in the workforce, organizations are recognizing that they are having to modify previous ways of doing things to meet millennials' needs. Transformational leadership is one such example. Drawing from the individualistic orientation of many millennials, some predict

³⁸ Northouse, *Leadership*, 33.

³⁹ Northouse, *Leadership*, 208.

that transformational leaders may be less effective because this cohort may be less willing to collaborate with others to achieve common goals. Relatedly, today's transformational leaders communicate in a way to encourage followers to prioritize organizational and task needs and goals over individual interests. However, it is predicted that this will be met with resistance as millennials have expressed a greater desire for work-life balance and want to "work to live" rather than "live to work."⁴⁰ Finally, it has been suggested that because millennials expect frequent promotions and value extrinsic rewards, two of the fundamental components of transformational leadership – idealized influence and inspirational motivation – may be ineffective.⁴¹

Transformational Leadership and Ethics

Leaders are involved in one of the most morally significant callings on earth, and nothing the leader touches is without moral meaning and importance.⁴² Blind trust a term I use when a leader has maximum impact but gives zero explanation of direction or vision because the people has placed total trust in the leader. This kind of leadership could very well be translated as hubris rather than transformational due to possible abuse of power by the leader.

I agree with Northouse when he says transformational leadership is concerned with changing people's values and moving them to a new vision. However, who determines whether the new directions are good and more affirming? Who decides that a

⁴⁰ Northouse, *Leadership*, 208.

⁴¹ Northouse, *Leadership*, 208.

⁴² Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 149.

new vision is a better vision? If the values to which leaders are moving their followers are not better, and if the set of human values is not more redeeming, then the leadership must be challenged.

History is full of examples of charismatic individuals who used coercive power to lead people to evil ends. For this reason, transformational leadership puts a burden on individuals and organizations to be aware of how they are being influenced and in what directions they are being asked to go.⁴³ Classic examples of coercive leaders are Adolf Hitler in Germany, the Taliban leaders in Afghanistan, Jim Jones in Guyana, and Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, each of whom used power and restraint to force followers to engage in extreme behaviors. At an extreme, coercion combines with other bullying and tyrannical behaviors known as abusive supervision.⁴⁴

Ethics is central to transformational leadership, and leaders help to establish and reinforce organizational values. Every leader has a distinct philosophy and point of view. Due to their influence, leaders play a major role in establishing the ethical climate of their organizations. Ethics is central to leadership because of the nature of the process of influence, the need to engage followers in accomplishing mutual goals, and the impact leaders have on the organization's values.⁴⁵

⁴³ Northouse, *Leadership*, 207.

⁴⁴ Northouse, *Leadership*, 13.

⁴⁵ Northouse, *Leadership*, 429.

Conclusion

Transformational leadership theory is connected to my project of “Transforming Leadership Cultivating Community Within The Church.” Transformational leadership plays a crucial role in promoting congregational unity with a Christian community. This leadership style is rooted in the biblical teachings, historical examples, and theological principles that emphasize servant leadership, empowerment, and a shared vision.

As reflected in my biblical foundations on Ephesians 4:1-6 illuminates the image of Paul being imprisoned and establishes friendship between author and audience that was also considered fundamental to encouragement. Paul’s exhortations often open with the verb (*parakaleo*, “I beg” or “I appeal”; Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 10:1; 1 Thess. 4:1) and a brief list of virtues (v. 2). The beginning then shifts from convention to a theme of the letter: unity in the body of Christ (vv. 3-6), verses two through four draws on Colossians 3:12-15.

Ephesians 4:1-6 provides the exhortation to “lead a life worthy of your calling” echoes Jewish understanding of divine election. God’s calling is to create a people who are devoted to God’s law. Though Pauline churches no longer follow the law, the conviction that election leads to a new life remains (1 Thess. 2:12). To be called by God out of the world and into the body of Christ is the highest vocation possible. The Greek word for church, *ecclesia*, is made up of a prefix and a root. The prefix is *ek*—out of. The root is the verb *coleo*, to call. The church in the New Testament is made up of those who are called out from the world, darkness, damnation, and paganism, to become members of the body of Christ.

Transformational leadership is also rooted in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as reflected in my historical foundations. Bonhoeffer's experience serving at Abyssinian Baptist Church of New York City was a good example of this theory. It was at Abyssinian where he was faced with the staunch reality on who Jesus is and what He embraced. Bonhoeffer's desire was to imitate Jesus, and to engage within the world He created to bring all to Him that they might believe. His preliminary visit to America did not afford him the opportunity to get what he was searching for until he arrived at Abyssinian.

There is a disease in the local church, and the cure can only be met with knowing the cause of Christ, and God's unlimited love for humanity. However, engagement and fellowship cannot be met on the outside of the building until it is achieved on the inside. For Bonhoeffer, Christians must see society from the perspective of marginalized people since faithful Christianity is calibrated from the perspective of suffering rather than from dominance. This is costly yet crucial to true Christian discipleship.

Finally, the theological foundation of love is an example of transformational leadership. Christians believe that God's love is unconditional and that it is available to all people, regardless of their circumstances. This love is demonstrated most clearly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the embodiment of God's love for humanity. The theology of love also emphasizes the importance of loving one's neighbor, which is a central teaching of Jesus. Christians are called to love their neighbors as themselves, and to show compassion and kindness to all people, regardless of their race, religion, or social status. This love is not just a feeling, but is

expressed through concrete actions, such as caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and advocating for justice and equality.

Theology of love also recognizes the importance of self-love, which is not to be confused with selfishness or narcissism. Christians believe that caring for oneself is essential to be able to care for others and is an expression of God's love for us. Overall, the theology of love emphasizes the transformative power of love in the Christian faith and encourages believers to embody this love in their relationships with God, their neighbors, and themselves.

By focusing on the needs and development of individual members, transformational leaders inspire and motivate congregants to work together towards a common goal, fostering a sense of unity and purpose within the community. Through the example of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated transformational leadership through his emphasis on serving others and empowering His followers, we can see this style of leadership is not only effective, but also deeply rooted in Christian values. Therefore, transformational leadership is an essential tool for building strong and unified congregations that can effectively fulfill their mission and impact their communities for the better.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The research topic will focus on the leadership and membership of the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church in Beeville, Texas, and its legitimate attempt to know one another internally to become more unified. Fellowship and engagement are a vital part of the local church. With both intact and active, the local church regardless of size can exhibit the spirit of unity in glorifying God. One of the many challenges in pastoral ministry is knowing the people you pastor. However, there is another challenge churches face, which is getting to know each other.

The title of my ministry project is “Transforming Leadership Cultivating Community Within The Church.” This endeavor can be achieved by the leaders and members of the local church community to internally engage and fellowship with one another to become unified as a church family. As the pastor of a rural church in South Texas, if there is internal fellowship among the parishioners which can result in building a strong community within the local church and having a better understanding of what it means to be a unified body of Christ.

The lack of fellowship is not restricted only to larger churches; it is a small church problem as well. While small groups in larger churches are an important tool for them to get to know one another; parishioners in smaller churches are most likely not to accept

fellowshipping with other parishioners in their local church context. My hypothesis aims to solve the problem of the lack of a sense of community, and members in my congregation not connecting in a local setting. If members are unable to function in a local setting without connection, there can be no fellowship internally as one body. When the church participates in a family Bible study and have fellowship with one another the members will began to see the importance of unity. Suitable teaching of parishioners current, new, and potential will allow a greater understanding that the Christian life is essentially about relationships and cannot be experienced fully in the absence of other people.¹

The area of this project identified with the membership at the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church located in Beeville, Texas. Beeville was once known as a thriving military city serving as the home of Naval Air Station Chase Field. When BRAC (base realignment and closure) affected Chase Field in 1993 the property was designated as correctional facilities for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church has a total active membership of sixty. Members range in age from thirteen years old to eight-five years old. Since the church is the only black Baptist Church in Beeville it serves as the hub for everything pertaining to the black community. The black population in Beeville and Bee County is not considered church goers unless a crisis or a celebration occurs. Whereas the church becomes enlisted to serve as a place for weddings and most of the funerals with people claiming membership, but rarely attend.

¹ R. Robert Creech, *Family Systems and Congregational Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 101.

Bethlehem is also a multiracial and multicultural church due to transfer of members from the First United Methodist Church, First Baptist Church, and the Catholic church whose lives has been enriched by the warmth of fellowship, and teaching. The challenge of leading in this context is hearing the chatter of the need to teach people about the culture of “our church,” teaching them about Christ, and the church Christ built. The past ten to fifteen years has been a shift from abandonment to acceptance.

When I arrived at Bethlehem twenty-two years ago there was a congregation that gathered, but there was not an effective program geared toward fellowship. This could have been due to auxiliaries or ministry meetings not being attended during the week. There was only attendance on Sunday mornings and some thought attending worship would only be beneficial. There was also moderate attendance during Bible Study, but no fellowship beyond that period. I can also recall during that period shopping at Wal-Mart and checking out with my items purchased. The clerk who helped me that evening could sense I was new the community, and perhaps needed a church home. After extending the invitation to attend the church she was a member of to her surprise I was the new pastor. The young lady proceeds to share with me her lack of attending church during the pastoral transition, and not knowing anything that was happening even if she was there. Hence, the seed was planted years later for such study to take place.

The project, “Transforming Leadership Cultivating Community Within The Church” was a six-week course for one hour that provided lessons on church fellowship, involvement, and engagement. It is imperative for church members to be able to understand being God’s redeemed people does not imply being God’s perfect people.²

² Creech, *Family Systems and Congregational Life*, 102.

The curriculum used were the foundation chapters and Bible lessons which focused on the subject matter.

Each of these topics discussed stimulated the participants in being more perceptive of the diversity in the local church. Furthermore, the topics discussed the importance of relationships within the local church resulting in fellowship and engagement within and throughout. The lessons were designed to explain the importance and relevance of community within the local church, and to be made aware that shared experiences offer distinctive levels of maturity to form a local congregation.³

Implementation

The first week was designed to be an ice breaker and explain the purpose of the project; including a meditation on Colossians 3: 12-17 followed by a period of questions and answers. The learning objective for the first week was: how Christians are expected to extend grace to others. The second week was a reflection on the biblical foundation with the emphasis on unity.

The third week was a discussion on the historical foundation with a discussion on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The fourth week was a discussion on the theological foundation of love. The fifth week was a discussion on the interdisciplinary foundation transformational leadership. The sixth week was a meditation on Matthew 18:15-17. Week six also served as a debriefing session followed by a period of food and fellowship.

³ Creech, *Family Systems and Congregational Life*, 103.

Methodology

All Bible studies were held in the fellowship hall of the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, with virtual opportunities given to a couple of the research participants due to their inability to attend in person because of work and relocation. There was a total of eleven research participants, and one participant withdrew their membership from the church a week after the research. They requested to no longer be a part of the research project; and I granted their request. Project participants were protected under the policy of the Institution Review Board (IRB) of the United Theological Seminary which regulates proper interviewing and data collecting.

There were also context and professional associates which assisted in overseeing the project to ensure that it ran smoothly and without incident of misunderstanding surrounding the problem statement and hypothesis. Associates were contacted prior to the beginning of the project and given progress reports throughout intermittently. Each participant was given a four-digit number known only to them and me. This number was used in communications, journals, interviews, and surveys. All documentation such as surveys and journals were collected after every session and locked inside my desk in my office. Information sent via electronically was secured with a passcode with no threats of compromise. Since the project was conducted during our scheduled Bible study hour attendance was not limited to only research subjects. There were individuals that attended in attendance who were enlightened by the material presented.

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

Pre-survey and post-survey questions were administered to determine the level of fellowship and engagement before and after the research project. The following questions were asked:

1. How long have you been a member of the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church?
2. How did you hear about Bethlehem, and what led you to become a member?
3. What does community look like for you with the local church?
4. Do you feel as though there is a lack of community within Bethlehem? Please explain?
5. What ideas/suggestions could we incorporate to strengthen the sense of community within the local church?
6. In the context of church, why do you feel community is important?

While each question was used as a benchmark to gauge a before and after effect; all answers given by the research participants remained unchanged. There were three interview questions given at the completion of the project based on the interest of the six weeks, and the overall feeling of community. Interviews were administered in face-to-face meetings for those who were able, and video for those not able to meet in person.

The following questions were asked:

1. Have you ever attended a small group?
2. How do you receive information from the church?

3. What ministry do you currently serve in or aspire to serve? Is there a key person that you would like to partner with?

As the execution of the project started to draw near there was a sense of nervous excitement. Emotions along with questions invaded my mind wondering if those who consented would attend, and moreover would attend throughout the duration? Am I wasting precious time and energy trying to excite people into something they have never done or have not done in a long time? To my surprise, these questions would not be answered in a negative light throughout our time together.

Week One

The research project commenced on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. Each session was inside the fellowship hall at the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church at 6:00 p.m. Dinner was provided for the participants and those who attended each week. It was important to start promptly at 6:00 p.m. since time was valuable to those who signed up, and the integrity of time was kept. I also knew the disposition of the church if our gathering went over a certain time frame. Each session began with prayer requests, and praise reports. This was a vital part of our time together because it allowed people to be made aware of the happenings in the lives of those who were present. Fellowship is stronger when there is dialogue exchanged and prayers offered to God on behalf of those who requested. Prior to each session, there was encouragement for attendees to mix and mingle just to see how the other was doing or if there was anything happening in their lives. I was also stunned to discover several people who did not sign up for the research project was not aware that some who attended were members of the same church. When

it was time to start, a welcome was extended as well as those in attendance to introduce themselves, share one thing people did not know about them, and how long they had been members of the church. It was then explained to research participants that I would go around the fellowship hall and assign them a four-digit number that would be known only to them and myself for identity protection. For those who attended virtually, I sent a text message to them with the number assigned, and reminded all to not share this information with anyone except to write their number in the notebooks issued which would be retrieved after every meeting.

Following the introductions, I shared a little information about myself, why this research project was important to me, and administer the pre-survey to those who were present. There were two attendees unable to attend in person, but they were present on video and the pre-survey was emailed to them. After the pre-survey, I collected the papers and gave a brief synopsis of what I witnessed in our church with the lack of internal fellowship and its importance. The supreme goal of the project is to build a strong community within the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church. This is included, but not limited to fostering connections, encouraging engagement, and providing opportunities for meaningful relationships and discipleship.

To set the pace of the project, I thought it would be beneficial to use brief meditations as bookends since the lessons would derive from my foundational chapters. For fifteen minutes Colossians 3: 12-17 was reflected on, and it was entitled, “Extending Grace To Others.” The Apostle Paul admonishes his audience that there is a responsibility to put off the old man as forementioned in the text, and then a necessity to live as a new creation in Christ. The Colossians were encouraged to throw off the old life

and to put on the new; these two things were non-negotiable. The new life of the Christian comes with a new realization of election from God which leads to the new look of conversion. Fostering connections within the local church comes with many challenges, notably the act of bearing with and forgiving one another. It was discovered during this period of meditation how love is the goal for every Christian regardless of racial, social, and cultural barriers.

Participants were asked to take their journals and write some reflections on what they gathered from Paul's letter to Colossae. There was also a group discussion from what they expressed. Number 5182 shared with the group that no one is perfect, and so much is expected from others while we fall short. Further account was given how when Christ comes into the life of a person all things are new, but we sometimes want to act like the old self. Number 1682 expressed that we are to imitate the lessons Christ taught us in giving compassion, kindness, humility, and let love be the guiding light of our lives. Number 1934 raised a question with the concern if people really know what grace is, and perhaps there should be more teaching on God's grace and the Christian extending grace to others. Number 3841 expressed agreements with the previous sentiments of others that we as Christians are here for one another, and the love God covers a multitude of sins.

Following the group discussion, there was a period of questions and answers. The preview of week two was given and making sure participants all had schedules in hand for the next five weeks. Encouragement for participants to remember their numerical identification was stated, notebooks of journals were collected, and a closing prayer was extended.

Week Two

On Wednesday, February 28, 2024, the second session was held. As stated at the beginning of the first session, starting in a timely manner was important. We started our time together with prayer requests and praise reports for five minutes. Following this period, a recap was given on the project “Transforming Leadership Cultivating Community Within The Church.”

The lesson was on the biblical foundation subject of unity. The scripture Ephesians 4:1-6 was discussed for thirty minutes. During the lesson, I reflected on the information presented in the text. The theme of unity, and how it is relative to the local church being a body, a family, and a holy temple were discussed. As we discovered how these three images share a common emphasis of being unified with one another as we are with Christ; each image also had distinctive emphasis. After the lesson, we had a group discussion as the question was asked, what is your takeaway pertaining to Paul’s letter to Ephesus on unity?

The participants responded in various ways how they understood what Paul was conveying to his audience and how it was applicable for the present time. Number 5128 shared that members of a church (especially those looking to grow) must realize the importance of fellowship and taking the time to intentionally get to know one another. It is important for us to have a church to call home to become more unified with other Christians; since there is no such thing as a Christian who has no church home. Number 5128 continued to explain the family aspect of unity by saying love never ceases, and Christians help each other grow. Number 2002 stated that as Christians we live every moment that is given to us according to our purpose God has placed. We are all one

under God's calling whether we might look or sound different; we are all to be about God's purpose of making disciples by showing love to one another.

Mutually, several participants stated that Paul's message for the church today is unity in the local church comes from having a new identity with Christ. The unity Christ requires from us must be maintained through the act of selfless love. While we are unique individuals who differ from one another, it may become easy to focus on ourselves, but unity requires us to think about those around us to form a community who communicates effectively and working toward a common goal.

Number 1682 concluded the discussion with thought provoking summary. The Holy Spirit does not practice division but unity. We are to respect the talents of others as in the body of Christ one is not better than the other. As Christians, we are going down the highway of life. On either side are fences, ditches, shoulders of pavement, driving surface and in the middle is a stripe. If you look at the difference, they are all within 1/8 strip on the center line of the highway. Everyone is different, but if we all see what is different then we miss out what unity can become. Following the ten minutes break, we reconvened for a period of questions, answers, and closed with prayer.

Week Three

On Wednesday, March 6, 2024, the third session was held. We started our time with prayer requests and praise reports for five minutes. Following this period a recap of last week's lesson was given. This would continue in the upcoming weeks to show the participants how the project and lessons would flow together. The lesson was on the historical foundation chapter with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and church community being

discussed. An overview of Bonhoeffer's life, theological education, writings, and his contribution to the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem was given. Reflecting on Bonhoeffer's life, he made contributions as a theologian during the reign of Adolf Hitler in Germany. While Hitler placed blame on the Jews for Germany's troubles, this led Bonhoeffer to become a voice for civil rights and unity. In his noted work, "The Communion of The Saints" Bonhoeffer believed sociology and theology were related. An understanding of a religious community is to be examined from within, taking claims of the community seriously. Without assuming this internal stance, Bonhoeffer believed the church cannot be understood at all. Bonhoeffer further believed the church is a community and has unity although it is not without conflict of wills.

When Bonhoeffer visited America to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, he became friends with a young black man from Alabama named Albert Franklin Fisher who was doing his social work assignment at the Abyssinian Baptist Church. Prior to visiting Abyssinian, he worshipped at the Riverside Church, but soon got weary of the sermons delivered there. When Fisher invited Bonhoeffer to Abyssinian, there was a sense of revival and great intellect when he heard Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. preach. Bonhoeffer was impressed with how Powell provided preaching with social vision. About Bethlehem becoming a multiracial church the past eight years, I wanted to spotlight that Bonhoeffer was not ashamed of being captivated by a church regardless of dominant ethnicity. I also wanted to share how he was warmly received by the Abyssinian Church, and their love for Christ and community.

Following the lesson, we had a group discussion as the question was asked, what is your takeaway pertaining to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and church community? Number

2002 expressed that Bonhoeffer is an example of the possibility of growing in faith through any circumstance and being a disciple in any situation. He was willing to carry this out at any cost which meant including death for his belief. This is the true meaning of Christianity as Christ did the same for each of us. Number 2020 indicated how this reminded them of when they became a member of Bethlehem; the church is expressive of who God is and is not ashamed to show love, grace, and mercy. Number 5128 shared how Bonhoeffer's principles and his teachings call out and resist the idea of status and the "us" versus "them" analogy that can invade some churches. Number 1875 shared a similar feeling by stating how Bonhoeffer believed so much in community and unity in the church that he was not afraid to go against the grain. Number 1875 continued their statement on how Bonhoeffer joined a black church, because he loved people and did not feel like an outsider because when you are a Christian; love must be shown. Number 2624 agreed with Number 1875 and stated how Bonhoeffer stood for what God had intended for all of us to do. He was not afraid to stand up for what was right and went to a church where he felt the presence of God. Number 0800 concluded the discussion by saying, we, as a church are to unite with all people regardless of color or character.

I then raised a question and asked if we are fully embracing what God is doing in the life of our church as we minister to all? The results in the group were affirmations of smiles, nodding of heads with an Amen. Before dismissing the group with a closing prayer, I shared with the group there is disease in the local church that can only be cured by knowing Christ, and His unlimited love for humanity.

Week Four

On Wednesday, March 13, 2024, the fourth session was held. We started our time with prayer requests and praise reports for five minutes. This session was carried with a heavy burden. I lost a cherished friend and mentor two days prior and assumed the duties of Funeral Director in Charge this very day. Preparations for his funeral to be held the day after this setting took an emotional and physical toll on me. As we began our time together and recapped the week before, Number 5128 expressed how excited they were as they visited a church the Sunday before, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer was mentioned during the service. The lesson centered on the theology of love.

At the heart of the theology of love is the belief that God is love, and that all love comes from God. Christians believe that God's love is unconditional and that it is available to all people, regardless of their circumstances. This love is demonstrated most clearly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the embodiment of God's love for humanity. The theology of love also emphasizes the importance of loving one's neighbor, which is a central teaching of Jesus. Christians are called to love their neighbors as themselves, and to show compassion and kindness to all people, regardless of their race, religion, or social status. This love is not just a feeling, but is expressed through concrete actions, such as caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and advocating for justice and equality.

Theology of love also recognizes the importance of self-love, which is not to be confused with selfishness or narcissism. Christians believe that caring for oneself is essential to be able to care for others and is an expression of God's love for us. Overall, the theology of love emphasizes the transformative power of love in the Christian faith

and encourages believers to embody this love in their relationships with God, their neighbors, and themselves.

Love is a central theme in Christian theology, and it is often described as the greatest of all virtues. It is a concept that is both simple and complex, with a myriad of meanings and interpretations. The Theology of love is woven into the previous three weeks of the project implementation. Since love is an expansive subject, it was crucial to delve into its understanding in the Old and New Testaments respectively. Love presented throughout the Old Testament is often tied to the idea of covenantal relationships between God and God's people. I believe there can never be a discussion about God until one identifies with God. Inherent characteristics of God revealed in scripture and displayed in God's actions in biblical history. They are characteristics equally of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God's attributes are revealed in progressively richer and fuller ways within the history of redemption.

Psalm 136 was one of the Old Testament texts introduced during this lesson of covenantal relationships between God and God's people. The Hebrew word 'hesed' explains God's steadfast love. In addition of the steadfast love God has for God's people in Psalm 136, we also investigated Deuteronomy 6:4 that embodies the great principles of covenant relationship outlining the nature and character of God spelling out Israel's responsibilities to Him.

The New Testament builds upon the Old Testament's teachings on love, but it also introduced some new ideas and concepts. Jesus is often seen as the embodiment of divine love, and Jesus' teachings on love are central to His message. In the Gospel of John, Jesus commands His disciples to "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn.

15:12), and He explains that by this love, others will know that they are His disciples (Jn. 13:35). Following a ten-minute break, we reassembled to discuss what was taught. The group discussion question asked what is your takeaway pertaining to the theology of love? Number 5128 thought this was the most meaningful lesson so far. Love plays a vital point in Christianity, and it is important that we understand what love means in this specific context. Just as God has intended and showed to us, love should be unconditional and shown to everyone regardless of how different they may be in comparison to ourselves. If Christians cannot express genuine love to their neighbors, what kind of example are we setting? How are we portraying God to others? It is the lack of love and a sense of superiority among Christians even in today's world that results in people being turned off by the idea of going to church or even acquainting themselves with Christians in general. Keeping this in mind, we must always continue to express love in as many ways as possible to as many people as we can. Number 1875 expressed how God's love never stops on God's end. I asked them to elaborate on that statement. Number 1875 continued to say how amazing God keeps loving us when we do not love Him, and we should have that kind of love for one another.

Number 0800 made a heartfelt sentiment stating as Christians there is no excuse for not loving. Daily when we awake with God's grace is another opportunity to show love. Number 1934 was appreciative to learn of the many types of love during the lesson. Number 1934 went on to ask how can one worship God without showing love? In my attempt to answer the question, Number 1682 shared that without God, there is no love, and with God comes unity, sharing, and closer relationships. Number 1682 went on to say how much they appreciate Bethlehem for being open to all who enter and show love.

I concluded the session on the theology of love in the local church. The church can practice the theology of love by encouraging its members to love God completely and others compassionately. This can be achieved through preaching moments, Bible studies, and other forms of teaching. The church can also organize events and activities that promote love for God and love for others, such as volunteer work, mission trips, and community service. Before giving the closing prayer, we realized how much we went over time with the discussion period. There were no complaints about the time and the group said they looked forward to next week. Closing prayer was given and we adjourned.

Week Five

On Wednesday, March 20, 2024, the fifth session was held. We started our time with prayer requests and praise reports for five minutes. The lesson was on the interdisciplinary foundation chapter with transformational leadership being discussed. This lesson would prove to be robust because the group did not know transformational leadership was an ideology. Their lack of understanding could have stemmed from leadership being discussed on the surface. After providing a working definition of leadership, there was a comment made to the extent how Bethlehem lacks male leadership. It was not my intent to speak on this matter through gender, but a door was opened for me to enter and share my thoughts. My thoughts were how our church witnessed a decline in male participation down through the years, resulting in women having to lead on projects, and ministry activities. Typically, in a rural context such as ours, men either did not have time to participate in church related activities or just refused

to. I went on to say how studying the concept of transformational leadership has made me a better person, pastor, and leader, energizing me to teach transformational leadership to the men in our church. However, our purpose on this evening was to stay on task with the research participants and stick to schedule presented.

Transformational leadership is one of the current and most popular approaches to leadership and has been the focus of much research since the 1980s. It is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership. Transformational leadership plays a crucial role in promoting congregational unity with a Christian community. This leadership style is rooted in the biblical teachings, historical examples, and theological principles that emphasize servant leadership, empowerment, and a shared vision.

During the lesson, I gave a reflection on the biblical foundation text of Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul's message to "lead a life worthy of your calling" echoes Jewish understanding of divine election. To be called out of the world and into the body of Christ is the highest vocation possible; this is a primary example of transformation. The Bonhoeffer account displays the ability to imitate Jesus, and to engage within the world Jesus created to bring all to Him that they might believe. Bonhoeffer realized Christians must see society from the perspective of marginalized people since faithful Christianity is calibrated from the perspective of suffering rather than from dominance. This is costly yet crucial to true

Christian discipleship. The theology of love shows how Christians believe that God's love is unconditional and that is available to all people, regardless of their circumstances. This love is embodied through the vicarious death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ who Christians believe is the embodiment of God's love for humanity. Through the example of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated transformational leadership through his emphasis on serving others and empowering His followers, we can see this style of leadership is not only effective, but also deeply rooted in Christian values. Therefore, transformational leadership is an essential tool for building strong and unified congregations that can effectively fulfill their mission and impact their communities for the better.

The group discussion question was what is your takeaway pertaining to the study transformational leadership? Number 2002 made the comment about how this lesson was needed for all in attendance and gave three key insights of a transformational leader. First, a vision must be shared to promote unity. Secondly, there must be inspiration for the leader to be the change agent, and finally giving others the authority and autonomy to lead. I chimed in with agreement to all that was said but added the authority and autonomy to lead is in step with the vision of the leader. Meaning, just because you are doing what has been instructed by the leader, it is done with order and trust of completion. Number 2624 shared thoughts on followers looking toward the leader for guidance and lifting the leader up.

Number 5128 acknowledged how crucial it is for a leader to be firm, kind, compassionate, transparent, motivational, ethical and many other things that comes along with leadership. They also stated how many leaders have different styles, but

transformational leaders promote unity and community. Number 1492 expressed the leader must be willing to learn the culture and dynamics of all people groups to be an effective transformational leader. Number 1934 provided a common yet timely statement on transformational leaders and their preceding duties of being good followers. I referred to my late brother who pastored the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Austin prior to his passing. I stated that my brother was a leader who was a “quiet leader” and had influence with people because of his fellowship with the pastor he succeeded. There were some voices of agreement when this was said because if you have been impacted by a transformational leader as a follower it should provoke you to do the same. Number 1875 concluded the discussion by building on what Number 1934 said. All Christians are not cut out to be leaders. They desire to lead and have never followed to become a good leader. Leadership is not about flexing muscles and giving stern commands; leadership is about encouragement and leading with respect.

Week Six

On Wednesday, March 27, 2024, the sixth and final session was held. We started our time with prayer requests and praise reports for five minutes. Dinner was served while a recap of the previous five weeks was given. I wanted the participants to see how the lessons, and group discussions connected. I gave a fifteen meditation on Matthew 18:15-17 entitled, “Ironing Wrinkles Within The Local Church” and explained how community in the local church is often fractured from the lack of forgiveness. Where there is more than one person, there is always room for a disagreement and offence. It is the duty of the church to not allow matters that can be talked out destroy the unity of

fellowship. Grudges are kept alive through the silence of siblings that can be worked out if there is communication from the two parties, other witnesses if your brother/sister does not listen, and the church if the refusal to listen is ongoing. While it hurts to excommunicate a member whose refusal to listen to the church, this becomes a matter of rebellion against God and God's teachings.

This lesson was timely because Bethlehem was amid a similar situation. After the meditation, the group discussion question was what is your takeaway pertaining to solving family issues within the church? Number 5128 stated how this is the best way conflict resolution for the church, and how it should never be leaked out to the public but remain within the church family with the result being reconciliation. Number 2624 added that we are all wrinkled from time to time in the family, and we need to work together to smooth things out. Leaving one church for another church because you are angry will lead to you taking the wrinkles or finding the wrinkles when arriving elsewhere. Number 1875 added that the church needs to spend a lot more time with a smoothing iron in our hand because we are all wrinkled and have no room to say otherwise.

Our discussion time had already exceeded its ten-minute limit, and I did not want to go over the time frame; so, I asked for a couple of closing statements. Number 5128 talked about the inevitability to avoid church conflict and disagreements; even more so now with social media giving a platform to discuss matters which are private. Number 0800 concluded the discussion by encouraging the church family never cease coming together in positive ways and moving forward through prayer. The post-survey was given after the discussion followed by words of appreciation, continuation of fellowship, and closing prayer.

Pre-Survey/Post-Survey Results

Pre-Survey and Post Survey Results

The pre-survey was administered during the first group session. There were six questions asked to a total of ten participants responding to the pre-survey: Numbers 1875, 2002, 0800, 2624, 3841, 1934, 1682, 5128, 2020, and 1492.

How did you hear about Bethlehem, and what led you to become a member?

All participants shared their experiences in various ways. Fifty percent of the participants previously had family connections with Bethlehem, so it was never a strange place for them because they grew up in the church. These shared moments of coming to Christ through the Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and responding to the sermon on a Sunday morning or evening service. Collectively, their answers were somewhat similar. In this group, there was one who shared being married to a church ministry leader is what caused them to unite with the church. The other 50% had heard of the church through job relocation, friends, and family who invited them to attend worship services. Several stated they heard of the new pastor who came to Beeville in 2002 and wanted to hear him preach. Years later, after their visit they were warmly received as family and decided this is where God wanted them to be.

The post-survey results of this question remained unchanged. It would seem frivolous to ask this question in the post-survey, but my intentions were to see if the participants showed integrity to the question and maintained their stability of church membership.

Are you familiar with the majority of the membership?

In the pre-survey, all except Number 1682 answered “yes” as Number 1682 responded with “somewhat.” I should have asked a followed-up question at this time. The purpose of this project was for Bethlehem to have connection and internal fellowship. As the pastor/researcher of this project, I can justify that while there is familiarity with members knowing one another; there is minimal fellowship among them. This fact is justified through an event which occurred one week prior to the start of the research. A fellowship meal was planned on Wednesday, February 14, 2024, which was Valentine Day. Members of the church were invited to attend in lieu of attending mid-week service. While I am aware some possibly had plans with loved ones at home or local restaurants this meal was served at no cost, with the expectation of fostering internal fellowship. One of the members invited a guest, and it was a blessing to see them connect with one of her former schoolteachers who is a member of Bethlehem. This provided a moment of connection and outreach as the guest was looking for a church home. During the evening, laughter was widespread, and the atmosphere relaxed. While I was discouraged with the lack of response to the event, it was confirmation that this project was necessary.

With the post-survey results the responses remained unchanged; other than Number 1875 changing their answer to “somewhat.” This change could be attributed to attending the research sessions and being around the church on a regular basis there could be room for improvement on being familiar with the majority of the church membership.

What does community look like for you with the local church?

In the pre-survey, several participants indicated community in the local is when there is unity and showing love within the church family. Other answers were practical but did not correlate with the focus of the project. The post-survey answers corresponded with the meaning of the project because of the understanding of the project's intentions. Number 1492 emphasized how community in the local church is feeling safe and fellowship becoming more of a need because the survival of the Christian is being surrounded by other Christians.

Do you feel as though there is a lack of community within Bethlehem? Please explain.

Several responses from this question varied, and there was no surprise to me that it did. Several participants answered with "no." Number 5128 would explain further with if there was a lack of community, it is attributed to a natural grouping among members where some individuals feel comfortable being around certain individuals. The rest of the participants answered "yes" and stated why. Number 2020 stated that some of the members are very private, and do not want you to know anything about them, including their telephone number or addresses. This could have been something instilled early on with attitude of people being told to mind their own business and stay out of trouble. Number 1875 attributed the lack of community reason being the age and work status of the congregation, and not taking time to talk unless paths cross in morning worship or Bible study.

I had high hopes of the post-survey answers changing from the time we started the project until now. However, when this post-survey question was asked several made

comments that they did not recall what was answered in their pre-survey. I shared with them the importance of knowing what was said before, so there could be either an improvement or no change. Ultimately, the answers would remain the same with Number 5128 stating the lack of community in the church had disintegrated, but the group meeting on Wednesdays for the project had grown closer, and more steps will be taken by the members getting to know each other more learning to be a better community.

What ideas/suggestions could we incorporate to strengthen the sense of community with the local church?

From the pre-survey, eight of the ten participants were thinking the question was centered around the community of Beeville, and not the church community of Bethlehem. There were great responses from Numbers 1875, and 1934. Number 1875 said we could fellowship as a church other than once or twice a week. Perhaps having a meal together or home visits different times of the week. Number 1934 suggested to finding out the needs of the members, creating a website so the church and community sees who we are, and church ministries coming together for interaction.

The post-survey offered better answers from the time spent during study sessions. One hundred percent of the responses were based upon the church spending more time together in other ways besides church related events. It is vital for community to happen within the walls of the church, but there is a refreshing feeling when we can leave the confines of the church building and go on the outside and fellowship. Number 5128 said it would be cool for the members of the church to hangout and have a bonding activity. The recommendation from Number 5128 happens once a year and happened recently

when we were invited to a church fellowship in Austin, Texas. We leave Beeville on a Saturday morning and stop in Luling, Texas for a barbecue lunch and a stroll through the downtown square. Upon arriving to the hotel and relaxing a few hours; we are then hosted by my family in Austin for an evening for food, fun, and fellowship. Those who journey with us look forward to going and has a great time.

In the context of church, why do you feel community is important?

Two of the pre-survey respondents misunderstood the question. While their answers made sense, it wasn't the answer I was hoping to receive. The remaining eight responses gave great insight highlighting knowing one another and growing closer to God to maintain unified. In the post-survey, answers were timely because of the group going through the project. The previous two misunderstood responses were rehabilitated. Number 1628 stated a church that does not have community will not be successful and have trouble no matter what they try to accomplish. Number 0800 response was related by stating being on the same page with one another to achieve a common goal.

Post – Interviews

Following the focus group, I conducted interviews with ten participants. Six of the interviews were held in person, and four interviews were held on Zoom. They were asked three questions:

What is your primary takeaway from being part of this small group project?

Number 1682 said they learned lots of new stuff to add with a lot they had heard before. The lessons were all different but had a common thread. Number 2624 stated it was a lot of eye-opening things that spoke to the needs of Bethlehem which can be helpful in the future. Number 2624 also expressed the last few weeks brought us closer and the project promoted unity. Number 0800 enjoyed the sessions and things were revealed that we need to do better. The last six weeks also improved our communication with one another. Number 2020 said our time together was needed and it provided an avenue of fellowship opportunities. Number 5128 saw the value of the small groups and getting a chance to know others on a more friendly level. Number 3841 felt it was good to see all the participants working as one and giving their best for one cause, and it brought us closer together as information was shared. Number 2002 shared that the small group was informative and enlightening letting participants know where they are as a group and ways to improve on deficiencies. Number 1875 stated this was a great way to fellowship, study, and learn in a relaxed environment.

Number 1492 enjoyed listening to each lesson, but also hearing perspectives from others that centered around the subject matter. Number 1934 stated they enjoyed the presentation of leadership, and how the lessons need to continue within the church. Our time together also brought distant people closer.

How do you receive information from the church?

Number 1682 receives information from texts, e-mails, and word of mouth. Number 2624 stated church announcements and pastoral observations is how they are

informed. Number 0800 also indicated pastoral observations was the channel information is communicated to them. Number 2020 affirmed they received information through church announcements, pastoral observations, and word of mouth around the community. Number 5128 identified their connection with different ministries within the church and their involvement that keep information current such as text threads. Number 3841 gets information from social media, text messages, and word of mouth. Number 2002 appreciated this question being asked as it is important to not only receive information but distribute information in various ways. Much of the information is through texts and email.

Number 1875 stated their information comes through phone calls, and texts. They are also around the church almost daily, so information is within reach. Number 1492 attributed information is received through pastoral observations, calls, and text messages. Number 1934 gets their information from the pastor and listening to church announcements.

What ministry do you currently serve in or aspire to serve? Is there a key person that you'd like to partner with?

Number 1682 aspires to serve in whatever capacity they can, and desired that partnership be with the pastor. There is also a desire to partner with leaders in the ministry being served. Number 2624 serves in culinary, pastoral anniversary, benevolent and choir. Due to their involvement in these ministries, partnership is operational. Number 0800 serves with the youth, and music ministry and was not interested in partnering with a key person at this time but believes in teamwork. Number 2020

currently serves in the beautification ministry, but also wants to serve more in women's ministry and work with the pastor's wife. Number 5128 is involved with the youth, and the choir but due to other commitments is unable to serve beyond those. Their desire is to partner with older members because it is who they look up to and seek guidance from. Number 3841 serves with culinary and wants to be more active in that department because our church is known for food during fellowship. There are other key people involved in culinary need not only partnership but also mentoring.

Number 2002 serves as a deaconess; this ministry is an encouragement in serving the church and pastor. Currently, partnership is with a key person is a work in progress. Number 1875 serves in a ministry called, "Walk to Siloam." This ministry is a retreat supported by Bethlehem and other churches in the Coastal Bend region of Texas. Number 1875 is also a Sunday School teacher and fills in for the pastor when he is away on Wednesday evenings. Regarding partnering with a key person, Number 1875 indicated that if our church would just come together in unity there will be a stronger community. Number 1492 serves in the women's ministry, but desires to start a homeless ministry due to the increasing homeless population in Beeville. Partnership is important with the pastor since he provides leadership and vision, especially to initiate new ministries. Number 1934 serves in the women's ministry, usher ministry, and has an aspiration to serve in the pastoral anniversary planning. There is no desire to partner with any key person currently, but it is important for the health of our church to become more unified.

Summary of Learning

The Doctor of Ministry journey and the related project have profoundly transformed me. Through this process, I gained a fresh perspective on life, leadership, and ministry. Before embarking on this journey, I often reflected on God's blessings during this phase of my life. I understood that becoming a better leader would not be handed to me—I had to earn it. What seemed unattainable became possible through God's grace and the support of a few individuals. Initially, this project was not the research I intended to pursue. My original plan was to explore the struggles and growth of clergy who, like me, began preaching and pastoring at a young age. However, my focus shifted when I noticed the lack of internal fellowship within Bethlehem Church. Before starting the third semester, I asked several people in a text thread what could be improved in our context. Their responses all pointed to the need for community and unity.

Completing this project was not without its challenges. First, there was a conflict that caused unrest within our church. Although I did not fully understand its origin, it felt like an attack on my leadership and integrity. Additionally, a few discontented members left the church, citing what they perceived as my misplaced priorities between school and church. While this may not have been the true reason for their departure, it was the explanation given to me. The church family and I supported their decision to transfer membership and wished them well. Secondly, we underwent a complete renovation of our sanctuary after a pipe burst in the men's restroom, forcing us to spend four months worshiping in temporary spaces across the street at Lott-Canada School and using the Charles Major Lytle American Legion Hall for special events. Finally, I faced personal

losses with the passing of my mentor in the funeral profession, Adam D. Trevino, and my oldest brother, Dr. Vernus C. Swisher, Sr. Their deaths impacted me in unimaginable ways. Mr. Trevino entrusted me with his final wishes for his funeral and requested that I become the Funeral Director in Charge at Trevino Funeral Home, in accordance with Texas Funeral Service Commission laws. From his deathbed, my brother urged me to stay strong and complete what I had started. Despite these challenges, I found comfort in the belief that God would provide a way forward.

The dynamics at Bethlehem have evolved during my time here, and it was a blessing to include a diverse group in this research. Not all participants were long-term members or had prior connections to the church. This diversity allowed me to see perspectives from both sides. Contrary to what a casual observer might think, long-term members were not less welcoming than newer members. In fact, all participants agreed on the importance of church family members knowing each other. The group sessions encouraged people who usually remained reserved to come out of their shells. During both the pre-survey and post-survey, participants were open and honest about what the church and community meant to them.

Overall, while some felt a strong sense of community, others noted a perceived lack of togetherness, suggesting room for improvement in creating a more community-focused environment. In the post-interview, participants expressed that the six weeks of fellowship in study passed quickly and should be continued soon. They also found the teachings inspiring. I intend to maintain the momentum and excitement generated by this project in the future.

Bethlehem is a great church, and I believe the best is yet to come as we continue to love God completely, and love people compassionately.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to strengthen the community within Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church. This was achieved through a six-week session aimed at understanding how to build a strong community within the local church and gaining a better understanding of what it means to be a unified body of Christ. If members cannot function together in a local setting, there can be no internal fellowship as one body.

Every week was the anticipation of coming together. The gathering was not only informational, but also interactional. Serving a meal every week was not solely based on showing my appreciation to the participants, but it was also designed to be a tool for internal fellowship. I was prepared to provide meals at my own personal expense throughout the duration of the six weeks. However, after the first week, the culinary chairperson told me there was no need to worry about upcoming meals as it was taken care of. This proved to me there was a measure of excitement, and their way of being encouraging in this endeavor.

Prior to every meeting there was informal conversation among the group which lead to everyone being comfortable speaking to each other. It was previously stated in the pre-survey by a participant how most of the members are private people, but I firmly believe it was during this moment people who acted unfamiliar with one another started to become family. Normally when events occurred at the church, people would show up

at the time the events started. This could be a matter of black church culture, but I observed how the group took time into consideration. If they would come early enough, there would be some free time to get acquainted. This project would be the beginning of something that could happen within the congregation itself. Ten volunteers for a research project would become proof positive to the larger congregation that intentional time together built deeper relationships. While everyone in the church has not embraced the idea of building unity, this project has laid the foundation of why it is important within the local church.

I have no doubt that the research was successful. I observed a positive change, with project participants encouraging our church to embrace unity. The project has fostered more connection within the church family such as celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and graduations. Communication has also improved, with group texting being used for the church and its ministries. The project has helped me understand transformational leadership and the significance of a unified church. Bethlehem, we are family!

APPENDIX A

SERMON

**Eric R. Tarver Sermon
“Maintain The Unity”
Ephesians 4: 1 – 6**

Uniformity is not guaranteed to promote or distort unity. I learned this during my senior year of high school at the start of the basketball season. Bastrop High School never suited out more than twelve players on the squad, but this season was different because there were three extras who could possibly make the team. Before the season started, two scrimmages would be held to see who would make the team. The team would wear what was known as “practice uniforms” which displayed the school’s colors, but not the school’s name. Just because the name was absent, and the colors were present did not mean unity existed.

Week after week, there are people who gather for worship in churches across the length and breadth of the land. They come from different backgrounds socially, economically, and spiritually. Those who have attended the worship experience could be in the category of the “haves” or the “have nots.” Yet, they are there because of the brokenness and bruising which has occurred in their lives as they have a desire to be whole and healed. This is often revealed during the moment how there can be unity in the building, but disunity in the body. Unity is important.

What makes unity important in the life of the child of God is our expression of Psalm 133:1, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” We speak of unity in another light. “And above all these put on love, which binds everything

together in perfect harmony” (Col. 6:14, ESV). Unity is the hallmark of the Christian life, and without it shows the lack of maturity of those who should be connected through unity.

No one understood the importance of unity than that theological titan from Tarsus, Paul. Paul views unity as something not to be ignored, but rather intentional; not to a drudgery, but rather a delight; not to be something required, but also desired. His expression of unity is that no one can be braggadocios or boastful where they are, and others are not. When one reads the prison epistle, Ephesians, they see Paul the reflector, and not the renegade of his former persona Saul threatening the saints of God with violence but encouraging them with a testimony of change. We do not see the theologian of such lofty heights in Colossians, not the passionate and paternal pastor of Philippians, and not the encourager for a godly man to Philemon to receive his runaway slave Onesimus.

Paul wrote this epistle to make Christians more aware of their position in Christ and to motivate them to draw upon their spiritual source in daily living, “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (4:1; 2:10). The first half of Ephesians lists the believer’s heavenly possessions: adoption, redemption, inheritance, power, life, grace, citizenship, and the love of Christ. There are no imperatives in chapters one through three, which focus only on divine gifts. But chapter four includes a directive in Ephesians that speaks of the believer’s responsibility to conduct themselves according to their individual calling.

Ephesians was not written to correct specific errors in a local church, but to prevent problems in the church by encouraging the body of Christ to mature in Him. It

was also written to make believers more aware of their position in Christ because this is the basis for their practice on every level of life.¹ This text is tailored to teach us that situations within the body of Christ leads to unity within the body of Christ.

At first look, the Apostle Paul uses a word which is described as humble, and conjunctive. The word “therefore” is one of the few words used in the Bible which turns to exhortation of Christian ethics. Paul did not begin with the moral demands of the Christian life. The first three chapters of Ephesians are a memorial of God’s acts, and God’s drama of salvation. Only after the story of grace has been told in (2:5) does Paul venture to voice the obligations of response. When the word “therefore” is spoken, actions should follow.

Although Ephesians is primarily concerned with the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, Paul’s emphasis extends to other relationships as well. Unity should thoroughly saturate every facet of the believer’s life. There is no question about it, we need one another, and we need to love one another. Repeatedly, God tells us to be concerned about one another in “one another” admonishments.

Ultimately, the unity and reconciliation that have been won through Christ’s death (2:14–18) are part and parcel of God’s intention of bringing all things together into unity in Christ (1:9, 10). Since the church has been designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness and the pattern on which the reconciled universe of the future will be modelled, believers are expected to live in a manner consistent with this divine purpose. To keep this unity must mean to maintain it visibly. If the unity of the Spirit is real, it

¹ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru The Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 402.

must be transparently evident, and believers have a responsibility before God to make sure that this is so. To live in a manner which mars the unity of the Spirit is to do despite to the gracious reconciling work of Christ. It is tantamount to saying that his sacrificial death by which relationships with God and others have been restored, along with the resulting freedom of access to the Father, are of no real consequence to us!

The ‘unity of the Spirit’ is to be maintained ‘in the bond of peace,’ that is, in the bond which consists of peace. Although the phrase has been understood instrumentally, so that peace, which has a bonding effect, is how the addressees will maintain and show forth the unity of the Spirit. It is preferable on grounds of Pauline usage and sequence within this context to regard the phrase as locative, signifying that peace is the bond in which their unity is kept.

In verses four through six, the apostle, however, is not speaking of a unity at any price in which the fundamental truths of the gospel are jettisoned. As a strong motivation for his appeal for unity he presents a series of seven acclamations, each using the word ‘one,’ in which we are reminded of the fundamental unities on which the Christian faith and life are based. This theological undergirding begins without any linking conjunction or verb in verse four as the apostle moves from exhortation (vv. 1–3) to assertion. The motifs one body and one Spirit are declaratory, yet they have the force of an appeal. The sevenfold list is basically threefold since three of these unities allude to the three persons of the Trinity, while the remaining four refer to believers’ relationship to the Spirit, Son, and Father.

God is the Creator of all living things, so that their existence and significance depend on Him. On this interpretation, Paul is affirming that God is supremely

transcendent ‘over everything’ and that his immanence is all-pervasive: he works ‘through all and in all.’ If this latter understanding is correct, then God’s universal sovereignty and presence are set forth as the climactic ground for the unity of the Spirit that believers are to maintain. His universal rule is being exercised to fulfil his ultimate purpose of unifying all things in Christ. The unity of the church is how the manifold wisdom of God is being displayed to the universe. The church is the eschatological outpost, the pilot project of God’s purposes, and his people are the expression of this unity that displays to the universe his final goal.²

Orphaned at age twelve, John Fawcett became apprenticed to a tailor and was largely self-educated. He was converted to Christianity under the preaching of George Whitfield at the age of sixteen and began preaching soon thereafter. In 1765, Fawcett was called to a small, poor, Baptist country church in Wainsgate, Yorkshire. Seven years later he received a call from the large and influential Carter’s Lane Church in London, England. Fawcett accepted the call and preached his farewell sermon. The day of departure came, and his family’s belongings were loaded on carts, but the distraught church begged him to stay. When Fawcett saw the tears of the church, he was leaving he decided to remain rather than leave and penned the words to the song: “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.”³

² Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 274–286.

³ Fawcett, John, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”, Hymnary, https://hymnary.org/text/blest_be_the_tie_that_binds.

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